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Martin Edward Foulkes

PhD thesis

University of Durham

Department of Classics and Ancient History

2005

Empire of coercion: Rome, its ruler and his soldiers

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05 MAY 2006

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Martin Foulkes

PhD thesis

Empire of coercion: Rome, its ruler and his soldiers.

Abstract

This thesis explores the basis of the political power wielded by Roman emperors. Its hypothesis is that their power was of an essentially coercive nature, and was a manifestation of the Roman ethos of competition for personal dominance. This competition took place within the context of a society in which war and military organisation were of prime significance. As a result, political power was habitually obtained and held through the direct and indirect involvement of soldiers. It was inevitable that the relationship between emperors and their soldiers should be the major determinant of their authority.

Issues considered to be relevant to this view are examined from a wide perspective and within the broad time scale of the classical world before the advent of the Christian Empire. Ancient writing on the nature of political power is explored, and every effort is made to give due weight to the direct expressions of our primary sources in their discussions of personal authority. Evidence is also cited from sociological and other modern theories of political power in order to illuminate the coercive basis of the Roman state. The development of power within Rome is traced, together with the explanations, justifications and mechanisms inherent to its operation. Soldiers are shown to have been the key agents of Roman political coercion. Bases of authority other than coercion are considered for their relevance, but are found either to have been derivative of, or secondary to, force and the threat of force. The qualities required of a successful emperor are explored. These are demonstrated to have been primarily military, while in the most significant aspects of political and personal behaviour the Roman ruler sought to establish and strengthen the bond between himself and his soldiers. When this link finally weakened, political authority passed directly to the soldiers.

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Preamble

‘When and why do men obey?’ asked Max Weber. Addressing his audience of students in the post-revolutionary Germany of 1918, he pursued his enquiry:

‘Upon what inner justifications and upon what external means does this domination rest?’

For all their rootedness in contemporary politics, Weber’s questions have a timeless relevance. Here I consider them in relation to the Roman Empire, in particular to the ascribed position and recorded activities of the emperors. What was the basis of their power? On what did their claims to legitimate authority depend? How were men and women induced, how indeed did they persuade themselves, to obey the commands of an Augustus, a Nero or a Hadrian?¹

The final part of Max Weber’s second question to his students may hint at an answer to these enquiries. ‘Domination’ certainly implies a completeness of authority, the existence of an unbridgeable gulf between controller and controlled, and the lack of any countervailing authority limiting what the powerful might visit upon the weak. Suetonius provided the Emperor Gaius with a most succinct expression of this state of affairs. Responding to his grandmother’s attempt to give him advice,

‘...he not only disobeyed her but said, “Remember, I can do anything I please and to anybody.”’

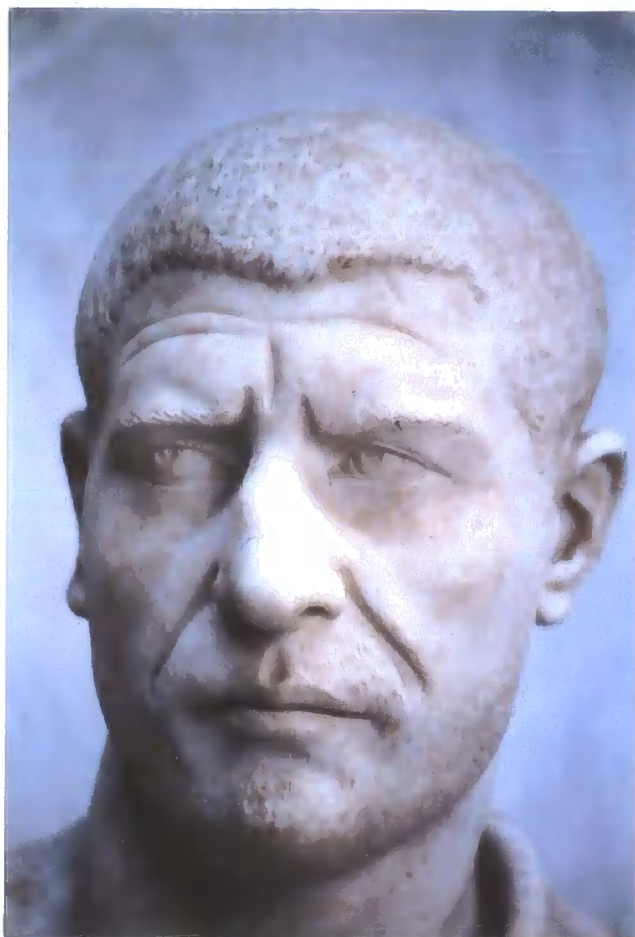
From this perspective, Gaius’ boast about his power may seem to reflect but an extreme version of the general relationship between a Roman Emperor and his subjects. Physical coercion, potentially of the most extreme forms, cannot be far from the surface in this situation. However, such a characterisation appears to be at odds with descriptions of other emperors in relation to those they ruled, such as Pliny’s account of Trajan as ‘one of us’, or the saintly Marcus Aurelius. Beyond the idiosyncrasies of individual emperors, recent scholarship has tended to stress the more positive aspects of Roman rule. For example, echoing discussion by Cicero and later legal affirmations, Ando has presented the Empire as having developed into a *communis patria*. This characterisation comprised a progressively more benign and inclusive regime, presided over by emperors whose personalities and individual

¹ Weber: 1948 p. 78.

aspirations, although not insignificant, were nevertheless gradually subsumed under the ambit of an administrative system that was generally responsive to the needs of the widening populations brought under the sway of Rome. In espousing this view, Ando acknowledged, as he must, the reality of conquest and expansionism as important elements in the Roman ethos. Imperialism was, he wrote, ‘...essential to the Roman self-image and to Roman political life.’ However, as the Empire became more established in its shape, and the participation of provincials in government extended, the aggressive drive to dominate that had engendered this process was seen as subsiding into political ideologies, such as that of *Victoria*, largely stripped of actively violent and coercive features. My thesis will put forward an alternative view that reflects elements of the sociological theories of Foucault, Bourdieu and Habermass. These characterise developments such as those described by Ando as camouflage rather than change; as social power becomes more established, its coercive elements are simultaneously softened and optimised, that is, translated into forms that are at the same time more acceptable to those who are dominated and more effective/efficient for those who wish to dominate. As we will see, the coercion at the heart of the developed form of Augustan ideology exemplified such an analysis.²

Another perspective on the Empire must be dealt with in any analysis of the role of coercion in Roman rule. This is the apparent change in ideology and political process generally dated to the third century CE. In the standard and current statement of this idea it is held that before then the Empire had indeed been ‘created and sustained by force’, but that there had been a significant separation (ideological, legal, social and geographical) between soldiers and the civil power. During the third century a combination of degeneration in the political process, a new or at least enhanced role for the army as vehicle of social and political advancement, and threats from barbarian tribes had brought soldiers centre stage in the *res publica*. Another aspect of this proposed transformation has been expressed in the nature and even physical forms of many of the emperors who ruled, often briefly, during the third century. Plausible physiognomic interpretations of statuary (**Plate 1 i and ii**) have supported the idea of a new breed of tough military emperors, given lurid biographical form in the pages of the

² **Gaius:** Suet. *Calig.* 29. ***Communis Patria:*** Cic. *Leg.* 2. 5; Dig. 50. 1. 33; Ando p. 10-15. **Imperialism and *Victoria:*** Ando p. 277-278, 410-411, 293. **Sociology:** Honneth p. 160; Habermass p. 211.



(i) Philip the Arab



(ii) Maximinus Thrax

SHA. The associated judgemental assessment of this development has perhaps changed little since Dickens described:

‘The murderous-headed statues of the wicked Emperors of the Soldiery, whom sculptors had not been able to flatter out of their villainous hideousness...’.

An element of my thesis questions the reality of this ‘change’. Perhaps, like the postulated transformation of Roman Imperial ideology from aggressive domination to consensual participation, there was no significant change at all. Rather, the observed higher profile of military elements in the political life of Rome in the third century and beyond may well be better understood in terms of continuity; that is, as another manifestation of Rome’s basic ethos. Any coercive system of government requires appropriate instruments of political force. It will be argued that, in the case of Rome, the soldiers of the legions fulfilled this role. To establish this characterisation, three strands of evidence will be drawn out. One will display the historical military/coercive ethos of the Roman state, with its emphasis on personal domination. Another will examine the political behaviour of the soldiers themselves, revealing them to be more active political protagonists than has generally been accepted. Related to this will be the third strand, indicating the close relationship between the emperors and their soldiers. Thus the iron ring will be completed, connecting autocratic military rulers with a political establishment imbued from its origins with a psychology of dominance chiefly established by war.³

To explore the hypotheses introduced above, this thesis will divide into two sections. In Part One the nature of coercive political authority will be considered and its manifestations in the ancient world will be explored. The material to be examined will progress from broad theorising about coercive authority to exemplification of its operation in Rome. Part Two will continue this narrowing of focus, concentrating attention on the personal authority of the emperors and their relationship with the chief instrument of their coercive power, the Roman soldier.

³ **Third century change:** Whitby p. 469; Dickens, *Little Dorrit* p. 583.

Part One

The Theory and Practice of Coercive Power

1. Introduction

Power and obedience

In describing the events of 193 CE, Cassius Dio introduced the contenders for Didius Julianus' throne without the slightest equivocation. The qualification for the post possessed by the rivals, Severus, Niger and Albinus, was simply described as '...each commanding three legions of citizens and many foreigners besides'. In 211, the death-bed advice of Septimius Severus to his squabbling sons was, 'Be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men'. By the end of the fourth century, the tradition of soldier/emperors was unequivocally projected back to the very end of the second century. The author of the SHA had Pertinax, on the first day of his reign, set the tone by providing the tribune on duty at the Palace with the watchword "let us be soldiers". The same author developed the theme as the third century progressed. For example, in his book entitled *The Thirty Pretenders*, the great majority of the brief sketches reflect the military background of the various would-be emperors. The effect was often enhanced by direct contrast with the effete and dissolute reigning monarch, Gallienus. For example, of Victorinus it was said that '...he was most valiant and...an excellent emperor', while the link between soldier and emperor was spelled out regarding Marius, who '...rose through the various grades of military service to the Imperial power itself'.⁴

To paraphrase the opening words of Reinhard Bendix' investigation into the historical development of power structures, 'This thesis, then, is about authority'. The need to explain authority in a broadly political sense has been spelled out by Cannadine:

⁴ **Three legions:** Cass. Dio 74. 14. 3. **Severus:** ibid. 76. 15. 2. **Watchword:** SHA *Pert.* 5. 7. **Gallienus:** SHA *Tyr. Trig.* 9.1, 23. 2, 26. 1, etc. **Victorinus:** ibid. 6. 4. **Marius:** ibid. 8. 3.

‘...for any society, in any age, the study of politics ultimately comes down to one elemental question: how are people persuaded to acquiesce in a polity where the distribution of power is manifestly unequal and unjust, as it invariably is?’

He went on to suggest that ways of approaching his question will relate to the particular disciplinary route followed and to the conceptualisation of the issue that is adopted. In relation to academic disciplines, his context indicates that he was thinking of the anthropological, historical, sociological, philosophical, political, psychological and theological. Conceptualisations are seen as differing both in how wide a view is taken of political power within a society and in the range of activities in which manifestations of that power can be seen to be operating. The range of such conceptualisations explored in the literature is extensive, and a focus on the asymmetry of power relationships and their bases certainly does not exhaust the possible perspectives. At their extremes, alternatives can be represented by a view of social power as essentially benign, resting on a mutually beneficial consensus between ruler and ruled, and by a view that any concentration of power is ‘presumptively illegitimate’. It must also be noted that other analyses examine power at more fundamental levels of human interaction, stressing that in some form or other, domination characterises all relationships. Nevertheless, even if an examination of the question of asymmetry does not fully explain all there is to be considered about social power, it still remains a potent phenomenon requiring investigation.⁵

My approach will be rooted in the methodology of the ancient historian and will focus on ‘statements’ of authority, whether expressed in language, imagery or behaviour. The historical orientation will help to define the sorts of explanation employed and the range of evidence to be tested. I would also hope to draw on relevant methods and material from other disciplines (philosophy, politics, sociology, law). The perspective to be taken on political power will encompass a number of elements: statements plausibly emanating directly from the emperor and from sources within or controlled by his regime; activities of the ruled, for example in religion and in the conferring of honours, that clearly reflect the prevailing Imperial ideology; and philosophical and

⁵ **Authority as a subject:** Bendix (1978) p. 3; Cannadine p. 19. **Conceptualisations:** Cannadine p. 17. Giddins (1984) p. 31-32. **Benign power:** Ando p. 66. **Illegitimate power:** Parsons (1960) p. 221. **Power in human interaction:** Foucault (1980) p. 102-108.

other expressions of general notions about the nature and exercise of supreme power in the ancient world. Within the Cannadine quotation there appears to be the idea that the assumption and/or ascription of political power in any concentrated form may be viewed by the relatively powerless as an arrogation. The requirement for its justification has the corollary that such statements may be contested. It has certainly been suggested that a plausible reason for our interest in the origins and nature of power centres on the general perception of the differential extent to which individuals can achieve what they perceive to be in their interests.⁶

The unequal distribution of power suggested by Cannadine as a perennial feature of a political society was famously studied by Max Weber. As already indicated, he placed the phenomenon within a concept of 'domination', which he declared to be '...one of the most important elements of social action.' Weber was careful to define his use of the term, limiting it to situations in which the relationship between the parties is one of compulsion rather than voluntary agreement. In fact, for the purposes of his analysis, he declared domination to be equivalent to the 'authoritarian power of command.' Weber identified three sources from which the legitimacy of any such domination could be established. The first of these was rational rules, the others being two types of personal authority, the traditional and the charismatic. Rational rules or norms might be agreed or imposed, but crucially they must be generally accepted by all those involved. In such a society, all elements of power/domination are seen to derive ultimately from these rules. Thus it is to the rules to that obedience is given, not to the individuals empowered by them. Where the legitimacy of personal power is claimed to derive from tradition, ancestral patterns of leadership are claimed by particular individuals and accepted by the majority. Such authority can usually be traced to the operation of 'natural' leadership in significant activities of the society, such as religion, war and the meeting of basic needs. Domination may be legitimized by charismatic authority when an individual claims to possess particular, usually remarkable, features or qualities that equip him uniquely to promote the success of the community. The achievement of success is deemed to confirm the legitimacy of the individual's claims. Obedience to the imposed domination then becomes a duty. Weber held that all forms of political power could be ascribed to variations and combinations of these 'pure'

⁶ Differential ability to pursue interests: Whitmeyer p. 211;

types. In applying this analysis to the ancient world, it may well be relevant that Weber, early in his academic career, had been a student of Roman law and society. Certainly, elements of his categories of political power are not hard to identify in a consideration of Roman emperors. The prominence of legal and procedural processes, the significance of *mos maiorum* and the relationship of the emperor to war and the gods spring to mind.⁷

Scope and evidence

The focus will be on the authority of the emperor per se, as opposed to Rome's authority over the rest of the Empire. This orientation implies a greater interest in the bases of the personal power of the emperor than in its application outside Rome. In any case, the political distinction between the City of Rome and its empire became increasingly blurred during the Imperial period, eventually all but disappearing after the final collapse of the western Empire. A stage in this development can be illustrated by the direction taken by Commodus' megalomania, as reported by the epitomator of Cassius Dio. Also demonstrating the increasingly personal nature of the emperor's authority, Commodus was said to have wanted Rome to be known as the,

'Immortal, Fortunate Colony of the Whole Earth; for he wished it to be regarded as a settlement of his own.'

In the approach I am suggesting, the cultural and geographical widening of views on Imperial authority remains a significant matter. However, there is not the same necessity to define the boundaries of the central group within which that authority lies. In addition, a focus on ideology may reasonably limit the relevance of comment on practical politics. For example, that Augustus's social legislation of 18 BCE failed to influence elite behaviour need not detract from its importance as an element in his ideological programme. In fact, the purpose and success of such measures may best be viewed as part of the production of an over-all ethos, promoted in a host of different ways. In this case they would be added to evidence such as Augustus' acceptance of the honorific title *Pater Patriae* and the elaborate imagery of the *Ara Pacis*. Thus the ideology of a regime may be revealed by the underlying pattern of its concerns, against which the actual effects of its activities may be of illustrative relevance. To use another example, interpretation of the imagery used on Trajan's Column may be relevant,

⁷ **Asymmetry and domination:** Weber (1968) p. 941ff; Thompson p. 151. **Pure types:** Weber (1968) p. 954. **Weber's academic career:** Bendix (1960) p. 26.

regardless of its accuracy as a record of the Dacian wars. Nevertheless, where the imagery of such a monument can be specifically shown to support or be at variance with other sorts of evidence, that evidence will in itself be important in underlining the Column's essentially ideological nature.⁸

Roman emperors in the context of other ancient rulers

The authority of Roman emperors did not develop in a historical vacuum. It may be correct to suggest that they are best understood '...in terms of the traditions and prejudices of Roman society.' However, this truism should not obscure the extent to which those traditions and prejudices were formed in response to wider, especially Greek, norms and influences. Some of the most fundamental aspects of Roman myth/history were clearly designed to articulate a desired relationship with Greek precedents. For example, at the outset of Roman historiography in the late third century BCE, Fabius Pictor may well have invented the story of the expulsion of the last king and the adoption of Republican institutions. The traditional dating of 509 BCE offers inescapable parallels with the Athenians' ejection of the Pisistratids, generally dated to 510. There may even be the possibility of some degree of historical reality in the coincidence of chronology. The adoption of Aeneas into the foundation myth of Rome, given such ideological prominence by the self-styled second founder, Augustus, provides a more certain example of the absorption of Greek myth.⁹

Viewed as the development of a new form of absolute authority, the power of Roman emperors had precedents and contemporary comparators. Exploration of these might or might not illuminate what happened in Rome, but such examination may be justified and important. Greek and other theories of kingship predating the Roman Empire will be considered elsewhere in greater detail. Here, by way of significant example, mention will be made of the creation of new monarchies by the *diadochoi*, the successors of Alexander. Reflecting their differing personalities, geographical and political circumstances, and at the same time drawing on aspects of shared cultural heritage and experiences, this small group of elites developed a more or less workable

⁸ **Commodus:** Cass. Dio 72. 15. 2. **Authority-Emperor/Rome:** For a focus on the latter perspective, see, for example, Ando, Mattingly (1997), and Webster and Cooper. ***Pater Patriae:*** Res Gestae 35. 1. ***Ara Pacis:*** Zanker (1988) p. 172. **Underlying concerns:** Bennett p. 90-92. **Trajan's Column:** Charles (2002).

⁹ **Roman traditions:** Campbell (1984) p. viii. **Pisistratids:** OCD3 p. 709; Cornell (1995) p. 148-150. **Aeneas/Augustus:** Wiedemann (2000) p. 520.

theory and practice of absolute authority. In Egypt, for example, this lasted for nearly 300 years. Adding to the intrinsic interest of this period for the present research, many of these kingdoms were ideologically opposed by, and met their end at, the hands of the Romans. At the same time elements of their operation and glamour influenced the development of the Roman Imperial system and the behaviour of emperors. In particular, it has been suggested that these would-be monarchs employed two main approaches to establishing their credibility; besides an understandable desire to exploit the prestige of Alexander, they all stressed and relied upon their ability in war. Other evidence for the relevance to this research of post-Alexander politics can be located. Citing Cornelius Nepos, Syme suggested that Roman interest in the histories of the *diadochoi* understandably increased with the rise of figures such as Sulla, Pompey and Caesar in the first century BCE. Here it is worth reflecting that after the upheavals of that era the Roman Empire did not collapse, as had the Hellenistic kingdoms. Instead the young Octavian was able to harness powerful aspects of the *res publica* to transform it into a durable personal monarchy.¹⁰

The relevance of the *diadochoi* to the present thesis is underlined by the specifically military elements of their regimes. Unfortunately, this has not been a much explored area of scholarship. Austin's 1986 lament that there was no work focussing on the Hellenistic rulers similar in scope to Campbell's 1984 study of the emperor and the Roman army has only recently been partially answered by Chaniotis. His work has addressed much of relevance to the relationship between the kings and their soldiers. However, its broad focus on war and society inevitably curtailed consideration of some of the more detailed military features of rulers. Examples of the sort of material that the missing analysis might include are that down to the last of the Ptolemies, Hellenistic kings wore Macedonian military dress and that their soldiers' oath was sworn to the person of the king.¹¹

¹⁰ **Hellenistic monarchies:** Shipley p. 33ff; Lund p. 154-6. **Influence over/conflict with Rome:** In the dispute for power with Antony and in his development of the principate Augustus provided evidence on both sides of this balance. **Hellenistic historiography:** Syme (1939) p. 250; Nep. *Eum.* 8. 3. **Personal monarchy:** Mann, M. (1986) p. 259.

¹¹ **Lament:** Austin (1986) p. 454; Chaniotis (2005). **Military dress:** Austin (1986) p. 458; Plut. *Ant.* 54. **Oath:** Polyb. 15. 25. 11.

The relevance of earlier Greek material

Greek literature consistently provided starting points and models for Roman analysis. Isocrates claimed that his *Evagoras* was the first prose encomium to a ruler. Supporting a view of the work's influence, it has been seen as a pattern for Xenophon's slightly later *Agesilaus* and as providing an ultimately conventional list of topics for such a work. Evidence can be found in Cicero for the wider influence of Isocrates as the 'master of all rhetoricians'. In considering the range of intellectual opposition to the Roman Imperial system, Murray noted the '...shadows of Socrates and the philosopher before the tyrant.'¹²

Of course, earlier Greek material was constantly recycled, by Latin writers, by Greeks of the Roman Imperial era, and indeed by Greeks of different eras writing about Greeks and Romans. In the last of these categories a good example is provided by variants of the story of a ruler not having the time to stop and listen to the petition of an old woman, including her punch line, 'Then stop being king/emperor'. It was noted twice in Plutarch, regarding Philip II and Demetrius, and in relation to the Macedonian regent, Antipater. In addition it appeared in Cassius Dio's account of Hadrian and became an established part of the medieval tradition concerning Trajan. Again reflecting earlier material, Plutarch recorded that Demetrius invaded Babylonia, claiming it in the name of his father, Antigonus. However, the author indicated that by ravaging the territory for movable booty, Demetrius had only confirmed that in fact the land belonged to its current controller, Seleucus. This account mirrored the advice that Herodotus had Croesus give to Cyrus on the latter's capture of Sardis. The defeated king reminded the victorious Persian that by permitting the city to be sacked, he was being robbed by his own soldiers. Once more drawing on precedent, Plutarch's Demetrius and Antigonus displayed a problem described by Herodotus in Solon's visit to Croesus, that is, the impossibility of communicating clearly and openly with a tyrant. In fact, the whole enterprise of Plutarch's parallel lives may be seen as reflecting a view of the comparability of the two cultures, an assessment given credence in the context of the Second Sophistic's wider nature as a deliberate attempt to demonstrate their compatibility. In the first century BCE Cornelius Nepos had felt it necessary to argue for the relevance of Greek *exempla*, at the same time as

¹² **Greek models:** Isoc. *Evag.* 8; Too p. 139-140; Cic. *De or.* 2. 94; Murray (1969) p. 261.

acknowledging cultural differences. Although Plutarch did not go as far as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and attempt to establish the Greek ancestry of the Roman race, he did discuss relationships between the Greek and Latin languages. Dionysius had declared his intention to be no less than to demonstrate the Greek origins of Rome; a purpose that, he informed his readers, was accomplished. In the course of this effort he also took account of Aeneas' role in the foundation myths of Rome by demonstrating Troy's own Greek ancestry. With a similarly grand sweep, Marcus Aurelius declared that

'...the whole court of Hadrian, the whole court of Antoninus, and the whole court of Philip, Alexander, Croesus...All these were the same, only the actors were different'.

As suggested by Fergus Millar, this idea was intended to express a philosophical truth rather than a political reality. Yet, as Millar goes on to say,

'...Marcus' words reveal the consciousness of a real continuity...of what a "king" should be which did indeed help to transform a Roman *princeps* into a descendant of the Hellenistic kings.'¹³

At the level of political philosophy and analysis a clear thread can be traced, for example, from Plato through Polybius to Cicero and beyond. In the *Laws*, Plato gave an account of the value of a constitution that balanced moderate authoritarianism with restrained democracy. Polybius echoed this in his treatment of the authority wielded by the Roman magistrates, senate and people. Cicero took up the same theme as an element in his deliberate attempt to marry Greek philosophical theory with Roman practical politics. His ideal state combined elements of royalty, aristocracy and mass democracy. Moreover, as part of his philosophical project Cicero explicitly stated that, in contrast with the work of Plato, his *Republic*

'...was no shadowy commonwealth of the imagination, but a real and very powerful State.'

It has to be added that Cicero's *Republic* did in fact reflect that of Plato in its juxtaposed accounts of the ideal city and the ethically ideal individual. There is also no

¹³ **Old woman's petition:** Plut. *Demetr* 42. 3-4 and *Mor.* 179 C-D; Millar (1992) p. 3; Cass. Dio 69. 6. 3; Bennett p. xvi. **Sacked city:** Plut. *Demetr.* 7. 2-3; Hdt. 1. 88. **Communication:** *Demetr.* 28. 5, 42. 1; Hdt. 1.30-33. **Second Sophistic:** Swain (1996) p. 137. **Exempla:** Nep. *Praef.* 1-7. **Language:** Plut. *Marcellus* 22 and Swain (1996) p. 140. **Dionysius' intention:** *Ant. Rom* 1. 5. 1. **Success:** *ibid.* 1. 89. 1. **Troy:** *ibid.* 1. 61. 1. **Marcus Aurelius:** *Med.* 10. 27; Millar (1992) p. 3.

doubting the seriousness of the Roman's philosophical artistry; thus caution is required before taking isolated statements at face value. Nevertheless, Cicero's model city was explicitly Rome and his own deep political involvement must indicate greater interest in its practical realisation than Plato's metaphorical application. As a specific example of the linkage between Greek and Roman political thinking, Suetonius claimed that as Tiberius became more sensitive to criticism and perceived challenge, a poet was executed for the 'crime' of writing lines that disparaged Agamemnon.¹⁴

The evidence from Republican Rome

In a consideration of the political power of Roman Emperors, there is less need to justify the relevance of evidence from earlier periods of the City's history. Always prominent in every aspect social and political exchange in Rome were the combined legal and ethical precedents summed up in the phrase *mos maiorum*. The traditional nature of power in Rome was stressed by Hannah Arendt in her influential 1958 paper on historical developments in forms of authority. Alongside militarism and religion, she saw tradition as a basic building block of Roman culture. The ruling elite looked to the models of their predecessors, particularly those of their own family, in order to establish legitimate ambitions and the limits of acceptable behaviour. The increasing strength of this perspective is perhaps illustrated by the post-Augustan development of the term *mos* from its original meanings (manner, custom, guiding rule of life) towards something nearer precept or law. An historical example of the pervasiveness and active power of precedent in Roman political life can be found in Tacitus' account of Nero's speech to the senate when he became *princeps*. At one level the young ruler was portrayed as reassuringly parading an adherence to wise exemplars and to the restoration of the 'ancient responsibilities' of senators. Tacitus, however, both insidiously undermined this statement of intent and doubled the emphasis on precedent. Members of Nero's audience noted that the speech itself represented an unwelcome novelty. Penned by Seneca, it was declared to be the first that had been written for a *princeps* by someone else. To underline the point, Tacitus proceeded to recall the exemplars of all the previous *principes*, interestingly including as his starting point Julius Caesar, to demonstrate that such 'borrowed eloquence' was an innovation. At a more practical level, Appian drew to the attention of his predominantly Eastern

¹⁴ **Greek and Roman political philosophy:** Pl. *Leg.* 691-692; Polyb. 6. 11; Cic. *Rep.* 1. 69; *ibid* 2. 52; *Laws* 3. 12; Laks p. 259. **Tiberius:** Suet. *Tib.* 61.

Greek audience aspects of his account of Republican Rome that he felt illuminated contemporary Imperial government. Thus, Sulla's decision to have himself 'elected' consul, at the same time as holding the dictatorship, was used by the author as a commentary on the emperors' acquisition of annual consulships. The mechanism by which adherence to *mos maiorum* could take on this dynamic character was spelled out by Tacitus in his version of Claudius' speech to the senate in 48 CE:

'Everything...which is now believed most olden was new...This (new idea) too will grow old, and what today we defend by examples will be among the examples'¹⁵

Methodological Issues

Another quotation:

'History is an argument without end and historical revisionism is not only inevitable but also inescapable'

Yavetz went on to suggest that any such revision will be based on one or more of three elements; new evidence, new methods of research and a new outlook. New evidence is likely to be a rare phenomenon in ancient history, although a steady stream of archaeologically discovered inscriptions have undoubtedly provided new insights into this general field of study. In relation to research methods, a degree of comprehensive coverage is perhaps a distinguishing feature of this study, facilitating a synthesis of available approaches. Only in outlook could I claim any originality, and that only of a strictly reactive nature. Although bolstered in confidence by the increasing number of advocates for asking the 'big questions', I need hardly add that in approaching this subject I am aware of the long shadow cast by many of ancient history's most distinguished scholars. I do not intend to attempt anything like a comprehensive critique or review of the wide field of studies of the basis of Roman Imperial power. However, references will be made to some of the main lines of interpretation, thus providing context for my approach and something for it to react against. Closer consideration will be given to a small number of recent studies, thus identifying more precisely the ideas and outlook on the topic that have sparked the present research.¹⁶

¹⁵ **Traditional power:** Lintott (1999) p. 5; Arendt p. 98ff. **Precedent:** Atkins p. 481-482. **Mos:** Lewis and Short p. 1168. **Nero:** *Ann.* 13. 3. 1-4; Wiedemann (2000) p. 529. **Sulla:** *App. B Civ.* 1. 103. **Claudius:** *Tac. Ann.* 11. 24. 7.

¹⁶ **Revisionism:** Yavetz (1990) p. 21-22. **Inscriptions:** For example those recorded by Millar (1984) in relation to Augustus. **'Big questions':** Schiavone p. 1-2.

I am aware of the possible dangers and distorting effects of undertaking a search for some single idea that will encapsulate the answer to so wide an enquiry. Historical explanations may be messy, partial or variable over time and in differing circumstances. A related problem is common to all academic endeavours. Its essence was described by Edward Said:

‘My two fears are distortion and inaccuracy, or rather the kind of inaccuracy produced by too dogmatic a generality and too positivistic a localised focus.’

A topic as large as the ideology of the Roman Empire is certainly prone to produce doubtful generalisations. These may be inspired by its complexity and long time span, and through the over-interpretation of unrepresentative details of fortuitously surviving evidence. In the wider field of studies of the development of power relationships, sociologists have long identified the pervasive problem of the teleological assignment of meaning. This involves the process by which the ‘stubborn historical facts’ are simplified by a concentration on only those elements that seem to contribute to a particular analysis and the stages by which it was reached. Max Weber, on the other hand, had directed researchers

‘...to construe meaning from what each set of contemporaries demonstrably thought or intended to promote’.

While this was clearly good advice, it is surely impossible to follow within the limited and partial sources of ancient history. Indeed, the problem may help to explain that great scholar’s decision not to pursue his early researches into Roman themes as he developed the new explanatory tool of sociology! Information on events and society in the ancient world is mostly limited to non-contemporary accounts by writers imbued with the aesthetic, moral and political values of the Greco-Roman elite. A demonstrable awareness of these difficulties and modest attempts to compensate for them may be all that is possible in response. My approaches will include: clearly signalling both the specificity of quoted evidence and the generality of any broad explanations; the consistent appreciation and analysis of authorial standpoints; and, wherever available, a balancing synthesis of a wide range of evidence. A further insurance against the dangers of explanatory monism may be available in relation to the sociological strands of my argument. Most of the material I will use has its roots in ‘second wave’, neo-Weberian scholarship, of which a principal characteristic was its

proposal of multiple analytical factors. For example, leading theorists agree in their identification of a variety of bases for social and political power, although on their precise number and nature there is perhaps inevitably less concurrence.¹⁷

¹⁷ **Distortion and inaccuracy:** Linderski (1990 p. 43) describes as otiose '...the pernicious preoccupation with definitions and the essence of things'; Said p. 8. **Teleology:** Merkl p. 114; Weber (1968) p. 7-10. **Values:** Raaflaub (2003) p. 425. **Multiple factors:** Hobson p. 287; see, for example, Mann, M. (1986), Runciman (1989) and Hall (1986).

2. The Philosophy of Kingship

Introduction

As a place to start, if only out of courtesy, any examination of the bases of political power in the ancient world ought to begin with a consideration of those societies' own thoughts on the matter. In the present context, such an examination must be brief and selective. It has been claimed that

‘...philosophy played a major part in the evolution of political thought on law and the state’.

However, at the outset it is also important to acknowledge that much of the ancients' theorising on this issue was related to philosophical ideals, literary programmes, and even personal and local political agendas, rather than the analysis of general political realities. For example, Plato, in as much as his *Republic* was meant to represent the blueprint for a real state at all, constructed his ideal community to be one in which there were no conflicts of interest between sections of the population. The required justice will only occur in the city, as in the soul, when each constituent part ‘does its own job’ in a proper relationship of domination or subordination. This hardly sounds like an analysis of practical politics, seen as the process of managing inevitable conflicts about authority within a society, which were referred to at the outset of this thesis. Perhaps betraying his real interest in the ethics of individuals rather than of societies, Plato studiously ignored the question of whether anyone should rule in the state, simply leaving un-argued the assumption that the rest of the population could be convinced that certain people had the skills and therefore the right to rule; clearly it does not need to be proved that, in order to act at all, an individual must be able to find some resolution to conflicts of motivation. Although it is another area that he did not examine in detail, it is relevant to my thesis that Plato saw war between neighbouring states as inevitable and permanent, and that the group he put forward as the source of legitimate authority, the guardians, contained both the philosopher/rulers themselves and their military enforcers, the auxiliaries. It was specified by Plato that the early stage of education for his soldiers was identical to that of the philosopher/rulers.¹⁸

¹⁸ **Role of philosophy:** Clark and Rajak p. 3. **Conflicts of interest and justice:** Pl. *Resp.* 441c-442d, 463a; Annas p. 104-105. **War, the Guardians and education:** Pl. *Resp.* 468a-470c, 412b, 414b; Annas p. 101-102.

The study of the source and nature of absolute power was of considerable interest to the ancient world. However, both the forms of ancient philosophy itself and the personalities of its proponents can be factors that limit its application to the analysis of contemporary power relationships. From the second century CE, Dio Chrysostom provided an illustration. In the published speeches, he certainly acted both in and beyond the overtly political world of his home province of Asia. In doing so he did not allow any of his stated philosophical principles to limit his activities in the pursuit of power and influence. Even within the speeches themselves his choice of persona and the nature of his audience undoubtedly influenced the sentiments expressed. Comments about the difficulty of interpreting Dio Chrysostom's *Kingship Orations* can be extended to ancient political philosophy in general. Thus, there are legitimate cautions for those who

‘...see the speeches as little more than lists of propositions about the good king, which can be wrenched from their context and deployed as evidence for general imperial ideology’.

Such extraction loses the ‘internal logic’ of a philosophical work, rendering ‘balanced interpretation’ impossible. In the case of Dio's four *Kingship Orations*, the current scholarly view is that they represented his general views on monarchy as an ideal form of government, modelled on divine kingship. It is true that they contain flattery of Trajan. It is also conceivable that the first and third *Orations* were actually delivered before the Emperor. However, even if this were the case, the example of Pliny's *Panegyricus* suggests no necessary correspondence between the speeches as given and their published forms. In short, there is no conclusive reason to believe that Dio saw Roman emperors in general or Trajan in particular as fulfilling the requirements for his ideal ruler. Thus it is not safe to assume flattery of the Emperor in the content of the orator's *First Discourse on Kingship*. In what he presented as a breathless summary of Stoic doctrine on the matter, Dio Chrysostom described the ‘administration of the universe’ as guided by ‘a governing purpose most righteous and perfect’. A ruler who upheld the correct principle was said to be ‘law-abiding, devout and orderly’. Invoking Homer's declaration of the divine origins of kingship, Dio Chrysostom went further; he stated that ‘...no wicked or licentious or avaricious person can ever become a competent ruler’. Later, in the guise of Diogenes the Cynic, he tightened the equation between ethical merit and kingship to the extent that:

‘...no one can be a bad king any more than he can be a bad good man;
for the king is the best one among men’.

Arguments for the ideal authority of a monarchical ruler were certainly in the majority in ancient thinking on the subject of power. To the extent that these ideas can be correlated with political realities, it is hard not to conclude that their unrelenting stress on the ‘good’ king, ruling by consent rather than fear, was more a wish-fulfilling response to the absence of such individuals than a considered reflection on the observed qualities of successful rulers. In some cases, for example Seneca and Nero, this state of affairs is all too clear.¹⁹

Peri Basileias literature

Plutarch stated that Demetrius of Phaleron, a rare historical approximation to Plato’s philosopher/ruler, counselled Ptolemy I to read books dealing with the office of king and ruler. He advised the monarch that

‘...those things which kings’ friends are not bold enough to recommend
to them are written in the books’.

Other than their titles (*peri Basileias*) and a scattering of fragments, this apparently large corpus of Hellenistic treatises known to Demetrius is lost to us. However, from earlier and later periods literature does survive that had in some instances specific historical relevance and in general must inform an analysis of Roman Imperial ideology. Aristotle appears to have written a now lost book on the subject of kingship, while his views on the subject in the *Politics* included the common philosophical ideal of kings ruling by virtue of their ‘...excelling all the others together in excellence’. However, although he conceded the possibility that this ideal could be manifest in some (primitive?) societies, Aristotle concluded that, in general, ‘...kings have no marked superiority over their subjects’; therefore ‘...all the citizens alike should take their turn of governing and being governed’. Of course, being more interested in how governments should operate than in analysing any actual manifestation of power, the philosopher did not trouble to consider how this just state of affairs might be brought about. However, the realities of the contemporary Macedonian monarchy may have intruded into his categorisation of the types of monarchy. There Aristotle noted the

¹⁹ **Context and persona:** Swain (2000) p. 4; see also Plin. *Ep.* 81-82; Swain (1996) p. 190. **Difficulty of interpretation:** Swain (2000) p. 42. **Importance of context:** Moles (1990) p. 298; Griffin (2000) p. 543. **Flattery,** 1. 36 and 3. 1-24. **Delivery:** Swain (1996) p. 193-194. **Trajan:** Swain (1996) p. 192. **Law-abiding:** 1. 42-43. **A king cannot be a bad man:** *Il.* 2. 205-206; Dio Chrys. 1. 11-14 and 4. 24-25.

phenomenon of the Spartan kingship, in which the roles of monarch and general of the army were inextricably linked. A generation earlier, Isocrates had been the active advocate of Philip II's leadership of Greece. Later his *Evagoras* was seminal in its laudatory prose account of a ruler. It had been preceded by the same author's *To Nicocles* and *Nicocles*, which were addressed to a contemporary Cypriot prince. However, although of interest for their presentation of a detailed programme of a ruler's political education and behaviour, they were probably more rhetorical exercises than practical advice. To the cautions implied by these points about the nature of surviving Greek *peri Basileias* literature must be added a reminder of the inappropriateness of using the elements we have, to fill in the blanks in our knowledge of the ideologies of particular regimes.²⁰

The Roman context

Recovered from the ruins of Herculaneum, the works of Philodemus include the most substantial fragment of the lost Hellenistic *peri Basileias* literature. It was dedicated to L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, possibly relating to his election to the consulship in 58 BCE. Presenting ideas of kingship in a mid first century BCE Roman setting was clearly a delicate matter. In doing so, Philodemus provided another version of ostensibly timeless general advice about the art of ruling, while at the same time:

‘The naturalisation of kingship theory in Rome through the mediation of Homer shows a touch of genius; a dangerous topic has been rendered harmless.’

Against this example of the careful tailoring of philosophical advice to fit the Roman context there is the comment of Rawson

‘...that most of the advice...given to Romans, either in fact or fiction, can be paralleled in our fragments of the vast ruler-literature addressed to Greek kings or other potentates’.²¹

In more ways than one, Cicero provided a major mediating role between the two traditions. It is undeniable that he played a consciously original and central function in the infusion of Greek philosophical ideas into Roman culture. Indeed he is credited

²⁰ **Demetrius:** Plut. *Moralia* 189D. **Lost literature:** Smith (1988); Dvornik p. 241; OCD3 p. 807.

Aristotle: *Pol.* 1288a35, 1332b24-27, 1285a3-16. **Isocrates:** OCD3 p. 769-771. **Warning:** Lund p. 154.

²¹ **Philodemus:** Morford p. 100ff. Murray (1965) p. 177-178. **Greek parallels:** Rawson (1989) p. 254.

with the invention of much of the necessary Latin vocabulary and wrote extensively on a variety of topics. These included texts of specific relevance to the present enquiry, for example, his outline of the ideal constitution in *De Re Publica*. Nevertheless, important elements within his philosophical expositions reflected an understanding of the essentially uncomfortable relationship between Greek philosophy and the agreed ideals of the Roman elite. Embedded within works such as *De Natura Deorum* and *De Divinatione* was a conscious contrast between the values of Greek philosophical reasoning and those of established Roman tradition. Thus, the first book of *De Divinatione* deployed a weight of revered historical anecdotes and evocations of figures such as Romulus in a defence of divination. Balanced against this in the second book was more recognisably philosophical argumentation opposing the practice. Not for nothing does Book 1 open with the weighty declaration that:

‘It is an old opinion, derived as far back as from the heroic times, and confirmed by the unanimous opinion of the Roman people...’.

A central character such as Cotta (significantly both sceptical philosopher and priest in *De Natura Deorum*) also supported his arguments by reference to ‘...what our ancestors have taught us’. For the purposes of the present research, the importance of these points is an acknowledgement that the ideology of Roman emperors was never likely to reflect Greek philosophical ideas in any but a form heavily modified by very different cultural norms. From another perspective, the combination in Cicero of a writer of political philosophy and active politician indicated that the two roles were compatible. This truth does not, however, make it any easier to extract clear political theory or factual analysis from the philosophy. This difficulty can be illustrated from the author’s account of Scipio’s ‘dream’ in *De Re Publica*. Scholars of ancient history, literature and philosophy have approached those passages from their diverse perspectives, coming to different conclusions about the way in which the references to Scipio’s career and motives should be interpreted.²²

Emperors and philosophers

The proposition that a wise man could usefully advise an all-powerful ruler can be traced back at least as far as the Solon/Croesus relationship in Herodotus. In the Greek world, it emerged as a practical possibility during the Hellenistic period. Stoic

²² **Cicero’s philosophical works and language:** Beard, North and Price p. 151; Cic. *Div.* 2. 1-3. **Cotta:** Cic. *Nat. D.* 3. 3. **Scipio’s dream:** Cic. *Rep.* 6. 10-29; Stevenson p. 140ff.

philosophers may have expressed differing views on the matter. Zeno, for example, was credited with the saying that the wise man ‘...will engage in public affairs unless something prevents him’, while Chrysippus appeared to be lukewarm about any involvement in politics. However, Stoicism’s view of the universe as a single system tended inevitably to draw its adherents into the workings of that system. Stoics known to have been advisers to Hellenistic rulers included Sphaerus and Persaeus.²³

Seneca’s relationship with Nero perhaps reflected the closest a philosopher/adviser got to the seat of Roman Imperial power. In *De Clementia* the Emperor was addressed directly and flattered in full Hellenistic style. The problem of giving advice without seeming to criticise or point out deficiencies was overcome by the expedient image of the work acting as a mirror for Nero, reminding him of his already supposedly established good qualities. However, Seneca seemed confident enough to use an imperative, ‘*adice*’ (‘consider further’), when addressing the young Emperor. In content, *De Clementia* reflected many of the recurrent ideas of *peri Basileias* literature. These included: the origins of kingship in Nature (1. 19. 2); the use of analogies, such as the power of fathers, teachers and significantly for this thesis, centurions (1. 16. 2); the king as the breath (1. 4. 1) and soul (1. 5. 1) of the state; the king as father of his people (1. 14. 1) and physician, ‘...entrusted with the life of all the people’ (1. 17. 2); the idea that the role of king amplified the personal virtues and vices of the monarch (1. 2. 3); the use of sun and light imagery (1. 8. 4) and of lions and elephants as noble beasts, symbolic of kingship (1. 5. 5); and at 1. 8. 1 the notion of the servitude of greatness. The nature of these elements as philosophical commonplaces, added to the evidence of Nero’s behaviour as emperor, must prompt questions about Seneca’s purpose in writing *De Clementia*. As suggested by ancient and modern critics, perhaps it represented either or both intellectual display and what might be equivalent to modern public relations. The extent to which Nero internalised any of Seneca’s lessons in being a ‘good’ monarch must be doubted. When feeling threatened, for example by his step brother, Britannicus, and his mother, Agrippina, the young emperor readily turned to murder as a solution. The central role played by Seneca in shaping Nero’s political speeches and edicts cannot be denied. However, any assessment of the

²³ **Solon**: Hdt. 1. 29-32; Rowe (2000a) p. 392. **Zeno**: Sen. *De Otio* 3. 2. **Chrysippus**: Long and Sedley 66B; Diog. Laert. 7. 187. Interestingly, this last source directly associated a charge of arrogance against Chrysippus with his failure to dedicate any of his many works to a king. **Sphaerus and Persaeus**: Garnsey p. 404.

philosopher's authority over the Emperor must be seen in the context of Seneca's partnership with the Praetorian Prefect, S. Afranius Burrus. The role of the soldier in the joint venture of advising and supporting Nero may be overshadowed by the status of the philosopher's literary legacy. However, its potency was demonstrated by Burrus' refusal to involve the Praetorians in the murder of Agrippina, and, most pointedly for Seneca, by the philosopher's rapid fall from favour on the death of the Prefect in 62 CE. To whatever extent Nero's power actually rested on the philosopher, it did so alongside the coercive force of the soldier.²⁴

From his vantage point as a Greek intellectual with influential friends in the Rome of Trajan and Hadrian, Plutarch provided much relevant material for mapping more general philosophical ideas onto the specific issue of political ideology. His wide philosophical interests, although described as being both popular and derivative, included technical treatises on the Stoics and Epicureans, and advice to young politicians. It is therefore perhaps not unexpected that a feature of his parallel biographies of rulers and other prominent Greeks and Romans was a keenness to demonstrate the relevance of philosophical motivation in his heroes. It can be further asserted that this tendency is part of a general desire to show his Roman subjects to be admirers of Greek culture.²⁵

Plutarch expressed clear views about the value of philosophy for a ruler and about the nature of the relationship between the philosopher and the possessor of political power. He started from the premise that philosophical knowledge could be of benefit to the private citizen, both by increasing his real happiness and by removing any evils harmful to himself or others. From this he argued that if such knowledge were to

‘...take possession of a ruler, a statesman, and a man of action and fill him with love of honour, through one he (the philosopher) benefits many.’

Plutarch expressed himself to be comfortable with the possibility that the philosopher's influence over a ruler might be achieved at the cost of his ‘being called a courtier and a

²⁴ **Flattery:** 1. 1-4; Dvornik p. 527. **Mirror:** introduced at 1. 1. 1 and expanded later: ‘...in order that what is now a natural impulse may become a principle.’ (2. 2. 2). **Adice:** 2. 6. 1. **Seneca's motives:** Tac. *Ann.* 13. 11. 2; Griffin (1984) p. 47. **Nero's speeches:** Tac. *Ann.* 13. 3. 1; Cass. Dio 61. 3. 1; Griffin (1984) p. 76. **Seneca's authority linked to Burrus:** *ibid.* p. 72; Tac. *Ann.* 14. 7. 4, 51. 1, 52. 1.

²⁵ **Philosophical range:** OCD3 p. 1200-1201. **Philosophical Motivation:** Rawson (1989) p. 236.

toady', and that the terms of the relationship would be entirely under the control of the political leaders:

'...(the philosopher) will not annoy them against their will, nor will he pitch his camp in their ears with inopportune sophistical disquisitions, but when they wish it, he will be glad to converse...with them.'

In the substance of such consultations, Plutarch's philosophers did not need to flinch from the harsh realities of political calculation. Thus he had the Stoic, Areius, advise Octavian regarding the fate of the son of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, Caesarion, that 'Not a good thing were a Caesar too many'. These views clearly reflected Plutarch's realistic appraisal of the power of the Roman Empire and its rulers. They were very different from those expressed in his whimsical tale of the response of an earlier philosopher, Diogenes the Cynic, to Alexander the Great; when the king offered to grant him any wish, he was said to have replied, "Get out of my light". Plutarch dedicated his *Saying of Kings and Commanders* to Trajan. He described them as '...the common offerings of the first-fruits that come from philosophy', claiming that unlike deeds, which can be affected by chance and circumstances, the attested words of great leaders provide the 'opportunity to observe, as in so many mirrors, the workings of the mind of each man'.²⁶

In the texts of his *Lives* Plutarch provided many indications of his views on the nature of power in general and that of Roman emperors in particular. His relationship with Trajan has already been touched upon and, in the depiction of his subjects, clear allusions are evident. These include a positive opinion of Augustus in the portrayal of Romulus. The *Lives* gave due prominence to the central role of military strength and coercion in the Roman state. Where it occurred, this aspect of Plutarch's analysis deserves attention in spite of or perhaps because of arguments suggesting that he did not understand the full extent of the military aspect of Roman politics. For example, the nature of Romulus as a warrior was drawn in bold strokes, the characterisation being introduced at the outset through the associated account of the origin of 'Rome' as the City's name. Of all the alternatives presented, that relating to the 'warlike strength' (ῥώμη) of earlier Pelasgian settlers was presented first. The idea of Mars as Romulus' father was included in relation to his mother Rhea and even protruded into

²⁶ Private citizen: *Mor.* 777A; 778F. The many: 777A. Status: 778B; 779B. Areius: *Ant.* 81. 2. Diogenes and Alexander: *Plut. Alex.* 14; *Diog. Laert.* 6. 37. Trajan: *Mor.* 172C-E.

another suggestion about the origin of 'Rome', that being a derivation from the Latin *ruma* ('a teat'). In the story of the baby suckling from the she-wolf, that creature was said to have been helped by a woodpecker. According to Plutarch, both animals were sacred to Mars.²⁷

Although, as another Roman subject, it was not paired with that of Romulus, the account of Numa provided a clear contrast with that of the City's aggressive founder. Plutarch emphasised the peaceful and virtuous qualities of Rome's legendary law-maker; 'the gentlest and justest of kings'. Before being made king, Numa's 'great name and fame' had been gained through the virtues of '...discipline, endurance of hardships and study of wisdom'. Perhaps illustrating the portrait's evocation of Plato's philosopher-kings, Numa was reluctant to take power. He explained that this was because of his '...inveterate love of peace, of unwarlike occupations'. He went on to state that

'...the city needs a king with a warrior's experience and strength.

Besides, the people has become much accustomed to war ...and no one

is blind to their desire for growth by conquest.'

This reflection no doubt related to the author's experience of Rome. In his account, the populace eventually persuaded Numa to become king, declaring that they were '...sated with war...and glutted with triumphs', and that he alone could unite their factions. The evocation of Augustan peace is unmistakable in this, as in many of the specific measures taken by Numa, notably his emphasis throughout on religious reform. Plutarch was so keen to establish the pacific credentials of the ancient law maker that he credited him with the symbolic removal of March (representing Mars) from its original position as the first month of the year. In addition it was said that during his reign the doors of the Temple of Janus were closed for 43 years. This reflected the action of Augustus, while diplomatically not quite matching the first *princeps*' 44 years of domination. Again the author was surely reflecting as much on contemporary Rome as on the myth/history of the great law-giver when he commented that to shut the Temple of Janus

²⁷ **Plutarch's analysis:** Pelling p. 345-346. **Romulus:** Jones, C. P. p. 89-94. **Rome:** *Rom.* 1.1. **Mars:** *Rom.* 4. 1-2.

‘...was a difficult matter, and it rarely happened, since the realm was always engaged in some war, as its increasing size brought it into collision with the barbarous nations which encamped it round about’.

However, Plutarch indicated the exceptional nature of Numa’s regime by characterising it as a necessary balance or antidote to the earlier ‘feverish’ condition (again evoking Plato) that had resulted from the City’s rapid increase in power. More pointedly still, in his comparison between Numa and Lycurgus, the author had no doubt that while the latter’s achievements were long lasting, the peace and friendship pursued by Numa ‘straightway vanished from the earth with him’ when he died. The doors of the Temple of Janus were ‘thrown wide open, and Italy was filled with the blood of the slain’.²⁸

In the contrast between Plutarch’s portrayals of Numa and Romulus it is not difficult to see elements of the traditional divide between the Romans’ self-image as dominant men of action and their characterisation of Greeks as passive thinkers of decorative but ultimately useless thoughts. Cicero, as philosopher and politician, had articulated the supremacy of the latter. He argued this in the sense that the power wielded over others by the politician was likely to ensure that more of his fellow-countrymen adhered to just laws than were likely to be persuaded by the arguments of the philosopher. This crucial limiter on the direct application of philosophy to Roman politics can be summarised from the early third century CE Athenian writer, Philostratus. In his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, he provided insights into philosophical ideas of kingship in a historically fanciful account of Vespasian. The Emperor was depicted as seeking the guidance of the philosopher about how he should rule. The advice given included both standard exhortations to moderation and practical tips about appointing governors who can speak the language of their provinces. Interestingly, Apollonius concluded his brief lesson with a suggestion that indicated the author’s understanding of the prevailing Roman distrust of philosophy:

‘So now apply yourself to the duties of your throne, lest your subjects accuse you of indolence’.²⁹

²⁸ **Virtues:** Plut. *Num.* 3. 5-6; *Cam.* 18. 1. **Reluctance:** Plut. *Num.* 5. 2-5; Pl. *Resp.* 519c-521b. **Sated and gluttoned:** Plut. *Num.* 6. 1-3. **March:** ibid. 19. 5. **Janus:** ibid. 20. 1-2; 73. 1-2. **Balance:** ibid. 8. 1-2. **Lycurgus and Numa:** *Synkrisis* 4. 6.

²⁹ **Philosopher and politician:** Cic. *Rep.* 1. 2-3; Stevenson p. 143. **Philostratus:** Rawson (1989) p. 248-249; OCD3 p. 1171; Philostr. *VA* 5. 36.

Other ancient ideas about the nature of power.

Ancient theorising about the nature of political power was not confined to those definable under the broad term 'philosopher'. Ideas from a wider range of sources must be considered potentially relevant to the development of the authority of Roman emperors. Monarchy, in its various manifestations, appeared as a prominent if not indispensable element in surveys of political thinking within cultures that must have influenced developments in Greece and Rome. Dvornik provided summary assessments of monarchy in ancient Eastern societies, although his analysis was characterised by an alarming 'Orientalism'. More dispassionate accounts also record the central role played by kingship in Babylon from the earliest times. Documents, for example Sumerian king lists of the early second millennium BCE, may even suggest that civilised living required the institution.³⁰

A king's right to rule was certainly a concern of both Homer and Hesiod. Homer presented the purpose of monarchs as being to arbitrate in disputes, command in war, take the chair at deliberative councils, play the host at feasts and to mediate between the people and the gods. In such ways the king may be seen as '...the agent of the community principle'. Despite clear and acknowledged failings in his behaviour and in the execution of the role, Agamemnon's right to command the Greek host at Troy was made clear by Homer. It was true that Menelaus was described as being 'co-commander', and Agamemnon's authority was challenged in the anger of Achilles and in the impudence of Thersites. However, Odysseus and Nestor repeatedly acted to bolster the expedition leader's authority. Ultimately this authority may have rested on voluntary oaths, and Agamemnon's decisions may have been questioned in a lawful assembly. Nevertheless, Nestor made it clear to Agamemnon that, 'Whatever (another) may initiate, action is yours'.³¹

In practice, to what extent could this authority be characterised as coercive? At an early stage in his saga, Homer portrayed Agamemnon as testing the resolve of the Greeks by insincerely suggesting that they should give up the siege of Troy and return

³⁰ **Orientalism:** for example, p 53-54 and 127-8. **Sumaria:** Kuhrt p. 30.

³¹ **Arbitration:** *Iliad* 23. 482-487. **War leader:** 9. 95-98. **Councils:** 2. 100-109, 9. 89. **Host** 4. 342-344. **Gods:** 2. 480-483. **Community principle:** Redfield p. 92; see also Finley p. 82-96 for discussion of the place of the king within Homeric Greek society. **Agamemnon:** for example, *Il.* 2. 474-483, 14. 133-134. **Menelaus:** 4. 205. **Achilles:** 1. 149-152. **Thersites:** 2. 211-242. **Odysseus:** 2. 244-264. **Nestor:** 9. 98ff. **Oaths:** Graves 160b; **Assembly:** 9. 32-49. **Action:** 9. 102.

home. The host, taking their chief at his word, stampeded towards the ships and were only turned back by the prompt action of Odysseus. Armed with Agamemnon's sceptre of command, he accomplished this in two ways. To the leaders of the detachments he explained that they had misunderstood what was intended, emphasising that it would be inappropriate to 'frighten' any of them 'as if they were a coward'. Odysseus nevertheless hinted at the punishments likely to be inflicted by Agamemnon if he were to be angered. The rank and file, however, he simply struck with the sceptre, disdainfully telling them that they were '...to be counted neither in war nor in counsel' and ordering them to obey 'others who are better men'. From this incident, a clear picture emerges of physical coercion as the ultimate basis of Agamemnon's power. The point was picked up by Dio Chrysostom, who drew from it material appropriate to his chosen stance as upholder of Hellenic traditions in a context acceptable to elite, and even Imperial, Roman interlocutors. He had Alexander defend the value of lessons that could be drawn from Homer by a monarch. These included the importance of soldiers behaving in a disciplined manner, silently obeying orders 'in fear of their commanders'; sentiments that chimed well with Roman military ideals.³²

Hesiod's interest in kings appeared to centre on their ethical values, while in the 'constitutional debate' Herodotus came out firmly in favour of rule by a single monarch, 'provided he is of the best'. This debate was perhaps the first 'unambiguously visible' account of organised political theory, as opposed to ad hoc political thinking. Herodotus associated the power given to a nation by a single ruler with a people's unity of purpose. For Thucydides, revealing the real bases of power in particular regimes formed an element in his over-all explanatory programme. Details of what these authors, and other Greek and Roman historians, had to say about the coercive nature of power will form much of the subject matter of later sections of this thesis. Tacitus' decision to open his *Annales* with the declaration that, 'The City of Rome from its inception was held by kings', emphasised the centrality of kingship in his consideration of the role of the emperors. It has been argued that the historian's use of 'from' rather than 'at' the City's beginning strengthened the statement of continuity.

³² **Odysseus:** *Il.* 2. 188-203. **Alexander:** Dio Chrys. *Or.* 2. 52; *Il.* 4. 431.

In order to place the ancient views into an appropriate interpretive framework, attention will first be given to modern theories of social power.³³

³³ **Hesiod:** *Op.* 261-263. **'The best':** Hdt. 3. 82. **Debate:** Cartledge (2000) p. 21. **Unity:** Hdt. 5. 3. **Thucydides:** 1. 9-10. **Continuity:** Tac. *Ann.* 1. 1. 1; Clarke p. 84-85.

3. The Sociology of Power

Introduction

‘The History of Rome is the most fascinating historical laboratory available to sociologists.’

Without attempting any precise definition of History it must be clear that its subject matter includes significant aspects of human social behaviour. It is therefore not surprising that historical explanations often share perspectives and data with sociological descriptions of human activity. In fact, although perhaps not so fashionable now, a perfectly respectable argument can be put forward to suggest that the two disciplines have so much in common as to render their academic division largely irrelevant. The attraction of Roman history expressed in the quotation at the head of this chapter was identified by Mann as relating to the subject’s longevity, its adaptability within a set of consistent core values and the quality of its documentation. Closer study will reveal problems in these ascribed features, particularly when subjected to the inevitable generalisations of ‘grand theory’. However, it is equally true to say that a positive assessment of the availability, range and stability of Roman material is not out of place when compared with that available for the study of any earlier and many later empires.³⁴

Analyses of Roman history that utilise recognisably sociological material are not difficult to identify; nor need they be of recent years. For example, it has been noted that von Premerstein was the first to suggest that Augustus developed a network of patronage to underpin the authority of the principate. Such a view has received support and been developed into more detailed analyses of the role of gift giving as an engine of social organisation. The study of inscriptions has identified a nuanced flow of goods and favours between commanders and their subordinate officers within the Roman army. In relation to the emperor, Paul Veyne has argued that benefits bestowed by the sovereign on his subjects lay outside any general system of exchange between

³⁴ **Laboratory:** Mann, M. (1986) p. 250. **History and Sociology:** For arguments uniting the two disciplines see Abrams p. 10 or Giddens (1979) p. 230. Focussing on the possible use of History in Sociology, Goldthorpe (p. 211-214) argued that the two are distinguished by History’s necessary reliance on incomplete ‘relics’ for its data, while Sociology has the opportunity to generate new evidence through fieldwork. Critical views of this approach can be found in the debate recorded in the *British Journal of Sociology* 45 (1) and in Kiser and Hechter (1998).

individuals. Instead they reflected his role as an agent of the state, thus forming a special case of euergetism, and revealing an element of the reciprocal relationship between the ruler and the ruled.³⁵

It is unfortunate for my analysis that Roller's perceptive account of this issue did not consider in detail the emperor's accession donative to the soldiers, confining itself instead to gift exchange at elite dinner parties. Nevertheless, the same author did note examples of the political ramifications attendant upon a ruler's operation of the social mechanism of patronage. Writing in the early third century CE, Cassius Dio used his narrative of a long discussion between Livia and Augustus about plots as an opportunity for a wide-ranging review of how a ruler can best negate actual and potential opposition. The importance of distributing material and honorific largesse in an effective manner was seen to go beyond its positive impact on the direct recipient. The ancient author clearly understood the wider social process at work:

‘A man...is persuaded not only by the kindness with which he himself is treated, but also by the benevolence he sees extended to others’.

The high status of the generosity/gratitude ethic was made clear by Tacitus, albeit within a narrative of simulated moral outrage. He described the senate as concealing its real motivation (care not to offend Vespasian) in its disingenuous condemnation of Caecina's desertion of Vitellius. Nevertheless the catalogue of base errors ascribed to Caecina was said to be that of

‘...the consul who had betrayed his country, the general who had betrayed his commander-in-chief, the friend who had betrayed his benefactor to whom he owed all his riches and distinction.’

As a final example, a significant element of Velleius Paterculus' explanation of the downfall of Julius Caesar was a perception that the Dictator had made catastrophic errors in his calculation of the generosity/gratitude sum in relation to Brutus and Cassius.³⁶

Roller underlined the importance of this sociological perspective in examining the authority of the Roman emperors. From the point of view of a classicist he did so in

³⁵ Von Premerstein: Roller p. 131. **Army gift exchange:** Saller p. 157-158; Plin. *Ep.* 2. 13.

Euergetism: Veyne p. 341-351.

³⁶ **Generosity/gratitude:** Roller p. 175ff; Cass. Dio 55. 14. 1-22. 3, especially 19. 5; Tac. *Hist.* 3. 37; Vell. Pat. 2. 56-57. **Patronage:** see pages 179-180.

relation both to ancient attestation and to the more usual modern historiographical focus on the constitutional shape of an emperor's power. Other ancient historians have gone further in an explicit examination of the sociological roots underpinning analyses of the Roman Empire. Hingley, for example, has considered the social context of historically prevalent views of Roman rule in Britain. He identified a progressive and positive characterisation of the dissemination of Roman culture among the indigenous population as being rooted in the ideology and social structure of Britain before the First World War. This was well illustrated by Haverfield's statement that

'...the men of the (Roman) Empire wrought for the betterment and happiness of the world.'

That such a view sat snugly within the context of elite attitudes towards the contemporary British Empire is clear enough. However, Hingley went on to suggest that there are continued echoes of this outlook in the still current, although now challenged, concept of 'Romanisation'. He argued that these resonances could be detected in an unquestioned assumption that the indigenous elite perceived intrinsic positive value in the acquisition of Roman culture. Perhaps such adoption was motivated purely by political calculation. Supporting this possibility is the speed with which most signs of Imperial culture disappeared in the early fifth century, surviving not much longer than the fading footprints of Roman soldiers. The same general point was made by Webster in relation to the readiness with which the concept of *Pax Romana* was absorbed into British scholarship.³⁷

It is supportive to the general thrust of my thesis that these sociologically coloured revisionist ideas find a prominent place for the pervasive and coercive role of the Roman soldiers. Alongside manifestations of the city, the legions have been given pride of place as key elements in the imposition of Roman ideology, even in relatively demilitarised parts of the Empire. Integrating these two factors, the military's technical and administrative resources were necessary to any large-scale urbanisation. In the context of these analyses, the grid pattern of Roman cities can be viewed as being more than a Greek inspired ideal of town planning. Its practical consequences come into sharper focus, reflecting both the layout of a Roman army camp and the surveillance/control advantages of clear lines of sight and fields of deployment.

³⁷ **Sociological perspective:** Roller p. 286-287; Hingley p. 82-84; Haverfield (1923) p. 10; Webster p. 4-5.

However, it is at the theoretical level that sociological analyses are most interesting in the present context. At the widest focus, the role of military activity has been identified as a 'constitutive element' in the very formation of the earliest states; while, in a more precise formulation, it was Max Weber who placed interpretations of gift giving into a more general consideration of the nature of authority in pre-industrial societies. For example, he outlined the features of modern bureaucracy, suggesting that today's depersonalised control through administrative/ bureaucratic guidelines

'...stands in extreme contrast to the regulation of all relationships through individual privileges and bestowals of favour...which is absolutely dominant in patrimonialism',

(patrimonialism being one of the theorist's characterisations of typical government in the pre-modern state). Elements of this type of political authority can be seen reflected in the rule of Roman emperors.³⁸

Sociological Theories of Power

From Marx and Weber onwards, one strategy for those seeking to construct scientific accounts of the operation of contemporary society has been to use interpretations of the past as indicative types, possible models and aetiological explanations. By the 1960s sociological methods and tools had been developed that were sufficient to permit the reverse of this process. In the use of specifically sociological methods and theories to make wide-ranging studies of the past, Eisenstadt's *The Political Systems of Empires* and Barrington Moore's *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* are frequently cited as seminal works. In his chosen field of bureaucratic empires, Eisenstadt described the task in which he was engaged as an attempt to identify '...some patterns or laws in the structure and development of such political systems.' These and subsequent works employing similar methods share an important characteristic in their treatment of the state as a central and independent 'actor' in social systems. As such, they follow in broad terms the sociological agenda set by Weber, whose concentration on the nature and operation of power within a state, rather than between states, adds to the relevance of his work. It is this factor, allied to Marx's

³⁸ **Army and city:** Whittaker (1997) p. 143-144; Hanson p. 75-76. **Grid pattern and sight lines:** Hingley p. 90; Foucault (1977) p. 200-206; This feature of town planning was clear, for example, to Baron Haussmann in the rebuilding of central Paris after the risings of 1848 (Robertson, I p. 22.). **State formation:** Haldon p. 5. **Gift giving:** Weber (1968) p. 958. See Millar (1992) chapter IV for detailed accounts of Imperial gift giving and subsequent chapters for the reciprocal acts of senators, equestrians and other sections of the population.

concentration on economics (control of the means of production) as the crucial element of social analysis, that explains why sociology derived from Weber is the more relevant to this thesis.³⁹

In his definition of the state, Weber emphasised the coercive aspects of its power. In the context of post-First World War Germany he said that

‘...a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’.

He went on to spell out the behavioural consequences of this definition, explaining that

‘...the state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i. e. considered to be legitimate) violence’.

In equally fundamental terms other theorists have come to similar and related conclusions about, for example, the rulers of such human communities. Poggi provided a characterisation of the

‘...prototypical political figure...as a warrior, availing himself of the military superiority he and his retinue enjoy over an unarmed, militarily ineffective population, not just to terrorise the latter, but to rule over it.’

Michael Mann perhaps went furthest down this road. In his sweeping and influential historical/sociological analysis of power relations he suggested that civilisation (by which he meant the most basic social structures) was itself ‘an abnormal phenomenon’ in human development. For him it represented a situation in which the earliest people had been ‘...caged into particular authority relations’ when the state and social stratification became unavoidable through the coercion of economic and physical compulsion.⁴⁰

While these ideas tend towards a similar direction, further enquiries about the power in these processes have diverged with regard to its nature and components. Weber identified the probability of certain behaviours as the basis of his definitions. He saw ‘social power’ as existing when an individual was likely to be

³⁹ **Sociological methods:** Tilly (1981) p. 43; Goldthorpe p. 220. **Patterns and laws:** Eisenstadt p. vii-viii. **Weber's intra-state focus:** Ickenberry and Kupchan p. 289. **Marx and Weber:** Jameson p.4; Kelly, D. (2000) p. 216. It must be noted that Kelly argued here that there were many similarities between the two scholars' approaches to the theory of the state.

⁴⁰ **Political power and physical force:** Weber (1948) p. 78; Poggi p. 5; Mann, M. (1986) p. 124; Munz p. 262.

‘...in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests’.

Accompanying the phenomenon of social power were others, ‘domination’ and ‘discipline’, again given behavioural definitions. The former indicated the likelihood that a command would be obeyed, the latter that such obedience would become habituated into prompt, automatic and stereotyped forms. Following Parsons, Mann widened this perspective. Weber’s definition he saw as restricted to what could be characterised as ‘distributive’ power, that is, power as a finite quantity to be shared by the actors in a given social situation. This was contrasted with ‘collective’ power, by which

‘...persons in cooperation can enhance their joint power over third parties or over nature’.

Mann went on to distinguish between four sources of power; ideological, economic, military and political. Each of these were differentiated by the intensity with which it was felt by individuals subject to it, and by the extent to which its parameters were accepted and seen as mutually advantageous by all the parties involved. Runciman identified what he called ‘dimensions’ of power. These were three in number and included the first two of Mann’s ‘sources’, while as his third he rolled up the latter’s concepts of the military and political into a single ‘coercive’ dimension. Runciman’s argument for doing so is of some importance to this thesis. Political power, he felt, had no fundamentally separate identity from that of the military. He acknowledged that ‘...states are not the same things as armies’, but held that political structures provided a form in which the three basic dimensions of power could be operated as opposed to those structures possessing some specific type of authority. This argument tends to bring the coercive element of social power closer to the front of the stage and is exemplified in a real society, that of Ancient Greece, in the next section.⁴¹

Fundamental to all these definitions is that social power must be institutionalised if it is to operate effectively over any geographically dispersed population and for any substantial length of time. Institutionalisation takes the form of control over the norms and laws of the relevant social group. This factor has been prominent in a widening of the very concept of power. Lukes was critical of earlier definitions because of what he

⁴¹ **Probability of behaviour:** Weber (1968) p. 53. **Distributive and collective power:** Parsons p. 219-225; Mann, M. (1986) p. 6. **Four sources:** *ibid.* p. 7-9, 22-28. **Three dimensions:** Runciman p. 12-15.

saw as their concentration on discrete behaviours, such as actions and decisions. He characterised as 'one dimensional' explanations couched in terms of the powerful obliging others to act in certain ways. Even adding a second dimension, that of controlling the agenda of decisions to be considered, was inadequate. Like Runciman, he added a third dimension. This comprised the capacity of the powerful to shape the basic landscape of social discourse. In this way the actual desires and aspirations of the powerless are determined by the powerful. Plato clearly had such a dimension in mind in his discussion of the control available through the 'Noble Lie'. Similarly, this approach to power resonated in Polybius' approval of the manipulative use of Roman religion (see pages 166-178). The totality of the Augustan transformation of Roman politics, culture and society provided another example of such power. Once achieved, such complete power cannot be opposed successfully by any individual who is without the backing of substantial collective organisation. This was well known to Roman emperors. Trajan cautioned Pliny about the potential political dangers of allowing the creation of any formalised citizen groups, even for such practical purposes as fighting fires. Although the Emperor might be judged to be over reacting in this instance, it is as well to recall that the popularity of the dissident Rufus Egnatius in 19 BCE was reported to have been based on his success in organising just such fire brigades in Rome. The volatile relationship between Roman power structures and the *collegia* is surely relevant here (see pages 133-135).⁴²

Like Weber, the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, viewed political power as an element within the wider landscape of social intercourse. He conceived the social relations of civil society as power relationships. This power was characterised as having more than one facet; in his terms consisting of 'hegemony armoured by coercion'. Although an imprecise concept in Gramsci's usage, 'hegemony' subsumed elements of an ideological outlook involving

'...the organisation of consent – the process through which subordinated forms of consensus are constructed without recourse to violence or coercion.'

⁴² **Earlier definitions:** Lukes (1986) p. 1-18. **Three dimensions:** Lukes (1974) p. 11-12, 16, 23. **Noble lie:** Pl. *Resp.* 414b-415d; Schofield p. 218. **Manipulation of religion:** Polybius: 6. 56. **Augustus:** for example, Zanker (1988). **Trajan:** *Ep.* 10. 34. **Egnatius Rufus:** Vell. Pat. 2. 91. 3

Tacitus' famous description of the 'benefits' of Romanisation (Latin, togas, colonnades, baths and banquets) readily springs to mind; 'The Britons...called it civilisation, although it was a part of their enslavement'. Perhaps Polybius was also exploring this conceptual territory when he discussed the transformation of primitive monarchy into true kingship. In the former, obedience was based on fear, while the latter implied the ruler's use of reason and virtue. For Gramsci, violence and coercion were generally packaged as 'domination' in contrast with hegemony. However, it has been noted that Gramsci was inconsistent in his handling of hegemony. Sometimes coercion was excluded from its workings, sometimes it was seen as a necessary element in the process.⁴³

This sampling of the ideas of sociological and political theorists regarding the nature of power has served to illustrate the ubiquitous role of coercion in the definition of social power. In considering the bases of the power of Roman emperors it is clearly difficult to avoid the role of military and other coercive factors. However, it is equally clear that there has been some reluctance to consider the politics of coercion in detail, notwithstanding the significance of its role in theoretical definitions of power. Gramsci expressed the relationship between coercive and non-coercive aspects of power in terms of the primacy of the former:

'Ultimately the ruling bloc retains power because of its control of the 'repressive apparatuses'...which enable it to keep other classes in subjection even when it has lost hegemony over them.'

If the issue has not already occurred to the reader, the language used in this quotation must beg the question of whether these analyses of power in the modern world can be relevant to ancient Rome. It must be accounted for that a scholar such as Fergus Millar deliberately eschewed a consideration of such studies. However, he recognised and, in his 1991 afterword, appeared to regret the resultant loss of 'percipience'. In addition, Millar's original reasoning, that as a 'proper objective historian' a use of modern sociological studies would undermine his wish '...to subordinate himself to the evidence and to the conceptual world of the past', was surely self-deluding. I am certainly not arguing that Marxist perspectives on class struggle or any other analyses of contemporary political systems have a straightforward application to pre-industrial

⁴³ **Hegemony and coercion:** Gramsci p. 263; Simon p. 27; Forcey p. 18-19; Tac. *Agr.* 21. **Organisation of consent:** Barrett p. 238-239; Polyb: 6. 6-7. **Inconsistency:** Hahn p. 468.

societies. Nor am I proposing that the Roman Empire can readily be equated with the concept of the modern state. Such topics have been discussed elsewhere and are not central to my concerns. Rather I am interested in the efforts of these theorists to define the nature of power itself and that within those ideas there is a consistently central role for coercion. It would be hard to argue that the rule of Roman emperors lacked at least elements of coercion. Therefore, the prominence of coercion in definitions of political authority must support the relevance of a systematic study of their operation in the Roman world. If such a study indicates a fundamental and consistent role for coercion, it may provide a pointer towards a definition of power that has wider historical applicability.⁴⁴

The Sociological study of empires

The move from a consideration of coercion in modern theories of power to reflections on its workings in relation to Roman emperors is assisted by broader historical/sociological studies of empires, in particular those of Eisenstadt and Mann. The former, setting out with the explicit aim to ‘...apply sociological concepts to the analysis of historical societies’, concentrated on a comparative study of what he saw as bureaucratic elements in the political systems of ancient and modern empires. As a prelude to this endeavour, Eisenstadt identified one of the crucial characteristics of any political system to be the imposition of what he described as ‘...severe secular sanctions in order to implement the society’s main collective goals.’ These sanctions were operated through that society’s military resources, the control of which necessarily became a major goal of the ruling element in any empire. At the same time control of military force was vital in order to pursue the main external policy of an empire, territorial expansion and conquest. From this position of central importance to an empire’s rulers it was not surprising that armies came to play a significant part in the political process itself. Eisenstadt’s formulation of the task faced by the ruler of an imperial state in controlling these coercive forces will be explored a little later (see page 40). For now it suffices to have established that he identified a vital and unavoidable political role for coercive force.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ **Repressive apparatuses:** Gramsci p. 275-276; Hall p. 68-69. **Ancient Rome and the modern state:** De Ste Croix p. 19-30. **Applicable analysis:** Gramsci was specific in his application of hegemony to contemporary industrial societies (Sassoon p. 113); Millar (1992) p. viii-ix, 637-638.

⁴⁵ **Sociological concepts in bureaucratic empires:** Eisenstadt p. vii-viii. **Sanctions:** *ibid.* p. 5. **Control of military force:** *ibid.* p. 130. **Political process:** *ibid.* p. 172.

Taking a wider perspective Mann saw the historical development of kingship itself and of the earliest empires in Mesopotamia as being significantly driven by changes in military organisation and technology. Sargon of Akkad was identified by Mann as the earliest known ruler to dominate otherwise dispersed peoples. His conquest of Sumer took place perhaps in the period 2400-2300 BCE. He was said to have achieved success by virtue of his control of an army and its required infrastructure. In this analysis later empires were facilitated by the development of chariot warfare, iron weapons and intensive forms of military organisation. An interesting element of this analysis at once widens the focus from purely military factors and emphasises their importance in more general considerations of power structures. It has been argued (pages 8-12) that Greek political and cultural developments merit a prominent place in this thesis by virtue of their broad influence on Rome. In relation to a specific comparison of empires it may seem to be less appropriate to examine the two side by side. However, Mann interpreted the macro-political aspects of Greek civilisation (alongside that of Phoenicia) as occupying a definable period between the respective decline and rise of true empires of domination in the east and in the western Mediterranean. In contrast with the empires of domination, the authority wielded by Greek rulers was characterised as that of a 'decentralised multi-power-actor civilisation'. Without going into detail, the elements of this complex structure included the small-scale *polis*, wider ('federal') influence brought about by sea-going trade and colonisation, and the even broader-based power deriving from unifying features of language, religion and social organisation. In relation to the role of military factors in the operation of social power, it is the *polis* that commands attention here.⁴⁶

As an institution the *polis* holds a significant place in the consideration of military factors as they influenced the development of ancient empires. A statement such as 'warfare was the *polis*' may be an over-simplification, but it sums up fundamental truths about the nature of Greek city states. The advent of the hoplite warrior and the accompanying deployment of a massed infantry phalanx in the seventh century BCE cannot be separated from the development of the *polis* itself. It is argued that the

⁴⁶ Sargon: Mann, M. (1986) p. 131-133. **Military developments:** ibid. p. 179ff, 232ff. **Relevance of Greece:** ibid. ch. 7; ibid. p. 223-227.

requirements of hoplite warfare, particularly fighting in close, mutually supportive ranks, had a profound effect on Greek social organisation. Thus:

‘...the close-packed hoplite line was as strong as its weakest part. Arguably the focus of battle was now as much on the weak as on the strong, and community morale important as well as community numbers.’

At its most extreme in Sparta, this factor became a dominant element in determining the political and social shape of the Greek city. The most basic family relationships, the education of the young, the operation of law and the organisation of the citizen body were all in large measure influenced by military requirements. In relation to the self-identification of the citizen body, participative politics and war were seen as two sides of the same coin. The former represented ‘...the city seen from the inside’, organising what was felt to be common to the inhabitants; the latter was ‘...the same city facing outwards’, opposing what seemed to be threatening or challenging to the aspirations of the population’.⁴⁷

In a manner that could hardly be given a more different colouring, the armies of the Great King of Persia were also seen as more than simply reflecting the political form of the state; in a fundamental manner they were the state, embodying the authority of the king. Herodotus went to considerable lengths to emphasise the huge numbers of soldiers gathered by Xerxes for the invasion of Greece in 480 BCE. He devoted a second preface to the historically unique dimensions of the force and a further 39 chapters to listing the contingents in detail, thereby consciously evoking Homer’s catalogue of ships. Beyond the sheer dimensions of the army, Herodotus drew attention to its role as symbolising the reach of the Great King’s authority. In assembling the force he

‘...had every corner of the continent ransacked....Was there a nation in Asia that he did not take with him against Greece?’

Xerxes’ ceremonial review of the assembled troops and warships emphasised the element of his personal control of the muster. The message was strengthened even further as the invasion began. Herodotus recorded that

⁴⁷ *The polis*: Osborne (1996) p. 176. *Sparta*: *ibid.* p. 180-184. *Politics and war*: Vernant ch. 2.

‘...Xerxes marched on towards Greece, pressing into service every nation which lay in his path...’,

adding the explanation that ‘...these areas had earlier been forced into subjection and made tributary to Persia’ Thus the fabric of the empire was articulated as the Great King’s ability to assemble its military resources. As expressed by Mann:

‘In fact the Great King’s army seems to have had a political purpose quite as much as a military one’

This purpose was to counteract a perennial problem of the Persian Empire, which was a tendency for its component satrapies to become independent power-bases and to promote a challenge to the monarch’s authority; in a phrase, to decentralise rule.⁴⁸

The importance of this problem formed a crucial part of Eisenstadt’s analysis of the phenomenon of empire. Having emerged from the existing group of elite families, any imperial ruler was faced by the task of retaining his position. A basic method of accomplishing this was to concentrate power under his control and to deny it to other members of the elite. To achieve this end it was necessary for him to minimise the development of alternative sources of authority and to ensure that the existing sources were subsumed under his patronage. In Eisenstadt’s terms this process involved the ‘universalising’ of the ruler’s authority within his territory and the creation and control of ‘free-floating’ resources of power, that is, agencies that retained no dynastic or other loyalties to alternative sources of authority within their society. Expressed in this way the process sounds straightforward. However, when the template is used to examine real political systems the difficulties are soon apparent. Consider, for example, the delicacy with which Augustus felt it necessary to manage the alternative sources of authority within the Roman elite. Equally problematic examples include the controversial political role of freedmen within the principate or indeed that of eunuchs (perhaps the ultimate free-floating agency) in the Byzantine state. In considering the centralisation of power under the Roman emperors part of my argument will be that an inevitable resolution of these difficulties was a reliance on military coercion.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ **Second preface:** Hdt. 7. 20. **List of forces:** 7. 61-99. **Review:** 7. 100. **Other nations:** 7. 108. **Homer:** // 2. 494-759. **Mann:** (1986) p. 245.

⁴⁹ **Free-floating resources:** Eisenstadt p. 118-119, 132-133, 91. Tacitus provided a clear example of Eisenstadt’s concept of free-floating resources. Nero’s powerful freedman, Tigellinus, addressed the emperor thus: ‘I have no divided allegiance like Burrus...My only thought is your safety’ (*Ann.* 14. 57. 2). Here the former slave would have been referring to the Praetorian prefect’s loyalty to his troops and/or to his original appointment to office by Agrippina.

Problems with comparative studies

Mann argued convincingly for the interdependence of history and sociology in explaining processes that take place in time and in the context of particular patterns of society. However, the sort of material produced by Eisenstadt and Mann presents problems that have not gone unnoticed by critics or indeed by the authors themselves. Mann recognised that what he called 'the messiness of human societies', their complexity and often unique characteristics, must make comparative analyses very difficult. He also accepted that, 'Historical narrative on a broad scale tends towards teleology', thus indicating the danger of imposing on events inappropriate patterns of relationship and causation. Eisenstadt conceded that a problematic feature of broad scale comparative studies such as his own was their necessary reliance on secondary sources for the wide range of societies included. In addition, he conceded that data from even these sources had to be dangerously condensed to avoid its swamping the reader. In acknowledging the discomfort he felt at his awareness

'...of how contentious the conclusions of even the most respected authorities can be,'

Runciman nevertheless braved it out, declaring that he had where possible

'...relied on authorities who...would be accepted as such by specialists of all schools'.

He named, for example, Brunt as his main source for Republican Rome, and other individuals for medieval Europe, central Asian nomads, later Japan, and elsewhere.⁵⁰

If the authors of these studies were able to identify difficulties with their comparative surveys of empires, critics of such large scale endeavours have viewed those problems as being far more serious. In particular Mann's 'huge canvas' has been seen as involving intrinsic 'errors and generalisations.' The same critic, this time focusing on a similarly broad study by Hall (1986), demonstrated the sharpness of this opinion, stating that

'...confidence in the success of this explanatory strategy is shaken on almost every page by a reckless disregard of knowledge and good sense'.

⁵⁰ **Problems** : Mann, M (1986) p. vii, 28-30, 195; Eisenstadt p. viii ; Runciman p. xi-xii.

Another critic described the use of 'scissors and paste historiography', while Goldthorpe broadened the issue, identifying in the ready use of secondary sources an inappropriately 'positivistic' view of history. By this he suggested the error of assuming that historical events could be reconstructed outside 'problematic literary sources'. In what he chose to title a 'sympathetic critique' of Mann, Whitmeyer identified a subtler problem in his subject's approach. He saw the large scale, 'grand theory', approach as leading to a concentration on the obvious sources of social power, that is, governments and armies, at the expense of the perhaps more diffuse, less tangible forces that shaped behaviour.⁵¹

Conclusion

These problems and criticisms all have substance. It would indeed be surprising if a reader did not apply something like them to this thesis. However, the difficulties do not invalidate attempts to systematise the study of empires of domination. Nor do they render worthless the search for general theoretical models to explain the shape and development of social power in society. Rather they demonstrate the difficulty of the exercise and draw attention to factors that must be born in mind when using such material. To an extent the articulation of these problems represents an element in the debate about the boundaries between history and sociology (see page 29). In this context Mann himself put up a spirited, perhaps overstated, defence of his methodology, claiming that practitioners of the former discipline tended to be

'...far less sophisticated when generalising about the societies they are studying, (preferring instead) a *pointilliste* methodology of piling on the quotations and the particularities without trying to arrange their evidence in more systematic ways.'

The difficulties inherent in broad and comparative approaches must also be seen in relation to the problems engendered by their opposite. For example, Saller acknowledged in the conclusion to his study of patronage in the early Empire that

'...a monograph on a single social institution or custom risks distortion by its concentration',

thus recalling the anxiety expressed by Edward Said (page 14). For the purposes of the present study the comparative surveys of empires, like the general theories of social

⁵¹ **Criticism of Mann and Hall:** Munz p. 263-4, 271. **Scissors and paste:** Bryant p. 12-13. **Positivism:** Goldthorpe p. 220-221. **Grand theories:** Whitmeyer p. 212-213.

power themselves, have a particular relevance. While acknowledging the necessity that coercion be, in Hobson's terms, 'embedded' within wider features of society, the broad historical/sociological surveys tend to privilege military force in their analyses of power relationships. Specifically, Mann listed Roman rule as one of his 'empires of domination', as opposed to those with more complex systems of political authority, such as Greece. The coercive features of Rome's military/political structure will be examined in chapters four and five.

In studies of society, war has tended to be seen as an abnormal, marginal and self-contained phenomenon. The detail of its organisation has generally not been integrated into the consideration of wider aspects of social interaction, such as the bases of political authority. To explain this phenomenon it may not be necessary to use the rather chilling language of Andrzejewski and ascribe it to '...the insidious utopianism which pervades sociological thinking'. Writing in the early 1950s he went on to contend that

'...most writers are rather peaceful by nature and brute force is a thing which they would like to see exorcised for ever.'

Nevertheless, despite this colourful language, he may have identified something real in contemporary and later analyses when he suggested an unintentioned alliance between, on the one hand, 'chauvinists' who did not want their idols of power to be examined and, on the other, liberal optimists whose belief in 'progress' included an eventual end to political violence. Thus, he argued, adequate attention was not directed towards military coercion as a factor in shaping political authority. The purpose of the foregoing section has been to relocate specifically military factors towards the centre of analyses of social power. The role of coercion in broad definitions of power and the significance of military factors in forming the basic shape of states and empires combine to support such a project.⁵²

⁵² **Mann's defence:** 1994 p. 40-42. **Problem of specificity:** Saller p. 206. **Central place of coercion:** Hobson p. 293; Sinopoli p. 166-167; Ikenberry and Kupchan p. 293. **Empire of domination:** Mann, M. (1986) p. 534. **Neglect of coercion:** Andrzejewski p. 1; Roxborough p. 619.

4. Coercion: the origins and development of political power in Rome

‘Rome’s first walls were drenched with a brother’s blood.’⁵³

Introduction

In relation to elite power politics, John Henderson has written about the centrality in the Roman experience of persistent and violent contests for control of the state. He introduced his ideas on the subject by noting that civil war had its roots in the very founding of the City, as the brothers Romulus and Remus disputed pre-eminence. In relation to the Imperial period, Henderson suggested that the grip held on the Roman psyche by internecine conflict

‘...provided the terms for the renegotiation of power relations between each succeeding emperor and his subjects.’

It is notable that the founding brothers’ dispute was not centred on the straightforward issue of which of the two should predominate; rather it concerned the decision about the actual site, the very fabric, of Rome itself. Deadly political proscriptions were certainly an unrelenting feature of Roman disputes for power, as they had been and were in the Greek world. Landmark examples included the activities of the Thirty in the post-war Athens of 404 BCE. In Rome, a description of Sulla as ‘...the first to put his enemies on a proscription list’ referred to the written publication and systematised nature of his political reprisals. Violence against political opponents, sometimes but by no means always legally based, had been a feature of the Gracchan disputes in the 130s and 120s BCE, while Marius had set a more immediate precedent for Sulla by the summary dispatch of political enemies in 86 BCE. In the Imperial period the use of military force to gain and hold power, and the employment of political violence amongst the elite, were such prominent features as perhaps to be taken for granted in modern analyses of the sources of social power. They could certainly be reported in a most matter-of-fact way by ancient commentators:

‘After his father’s death, Caracalla seized power and immediately began to murder everyone in the court’ (literally, ‘starting from the hearth’, that is, those closest to his father’s regime.)

⁵³ Quotation: Luc. 1. 95.

A consideration of some of the detail of such events, seen in the context of the ideals and ethos of the Republic, will refocus attention onto these crucial elements in understanding ancient Rome and the power of the emperors.⁵⁴

The Republic

Our primary sources mapped out their view of early Rome on a military pattern. The consistency with which they did this, allied to that pattern's continuation into periods contemporaneous with the later writers, leaves little room to doubt its essential authenticity. In addition to evocations of Epaminondas and Xenophon, Plutarch used the even more ancient words of Pindar in order to emphasise the strength of Rome's warlike ethos, declaring it to be 'a precinct of much-warring Ares'. The usual presentation of the two main strands of the City's foundation myth, those involving Romulus and his Trojan ancestor, Aeneas, brought into the foreground both war and the establishment of authority by violent means. Plutarch, for example, arranged his description of Romulus' organisation of the City's population in order to give prominence to military affairs:

'When the city was first built...Romulus divided all the multitude that were of age to bear arms into military companies...Such a company was called a "legion", because the warlike were selected out of all.'

The organisation of the people, patricians, senate and other matters then followed. The founder's deadly contest with his brother had already been described. Velleius Paterculus provided a glimpse into the debates that must have been engendered about the practical details of this founding myth. He declared himself to be in accord with those who held that, because of the threat from neighbouring tribes, Romulus must have been assisted by troops provided by his grandfather, Latinus. In his dense and brilliant preface, Livy alluded to the mingling of divine and human elements in traditions about the origins of cities. He cited the case of Rome as a specific justification for including the gods in such stories. This he did because of what he portrayed as the inescapable logic behind the involvement of the deity concerned, a logic that underlined Romans' demonstrable military superiority:

⁵⁴ **Romulus and Remus:** Henderson p. 1; '...the brothers' plans for the future were marred by the same curse...jealousy and ambition' (Livy 1. 6); Herodian provided a catalogue of fraternal power struggles (4. 5. 5-6). **The site of Rome:** Plut. *Rom.* 9. 4-10. 1. **The Thirty:** Xen. *Hell.* 2. 3. 21-56; Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 35. 4. **Gracchi:** Stockton p. 119-120. **Marius:** OCD3 p. 925. **Sulla:** App. *B Civ.* 4. 1. 1, 1. 95-96; Henderson p. 15-16. **Caracalla:** Herodian 3. 15. 4. The historian later added the grisly detail (4. 6).

‘...if any people ought to be allowed to consecrate their origins and refer them to a divine source, so great is the military glory of the Roman people that when they profess that their Father and the Father of their Founder was none other than Mars, the nations of the earth may well submit to this also with as good a grace as they submit to Rome’s dominion.’

Thus, soldiers and martial qualities were placed centre-stage in the Romulus myth. Even before the establishment of an organised city, aggression and violence were in the foreground of ancient accounts. Plutarch decorously indicated that Romulus and Remus grew up as part of a community of adventurous and bold young shepherds. Amongst their activities was said to be that of ‘driving off robbers’. Livy had expressed this a little more directly, saying that they ‘...would attack robbers laden with their spoils, and divide up what they took’. By the second half of the fourth century CE the legend could be put in blunter manner; Eutropius had Romulus ‘...leading the life of a robber among the shepherds’ and reported that the Romans of that time

‘...because of their habitual warfare, were by now considered robbers and semi-barbarians’.

Thus is laid bare the foundation of Romans’ self-image.⁵⁵

In Livy’s account of Aeneas and the generations before Romulus, war and violence were the mainsprings of development. The refugees from Troy arrived in Italy with ‘nothing left but their swords and ships’. War and treaties characterised early relations with the Latins. Prior to the death of Aeneas, wars were fought against the Rutulians and Etruscans. After several generations, the birth of Romulus and Remus was prefaced by an earlier occurrence of fraternal rivalry, as Amulius drove out Numitor. Virgil’s handling of the Aeneas myth necessarily reflected the poet’s wide-ranging aims, having to incorporate the mythic past of Homeric epic, as well as evocations of contemporary politics and propaganda about the future of Rome. Violence, however, formed the centre of his story. Unable to prevent the ordained establishment of the Trojan refugees in Italy, Hera was portrayed as scheming to ensure that the process would be bloody. Books nine to twelve of the *Aeneid* are dominated by war, fighting

⁵⁵ **Ares:** Plut. *Marc.* 21. 3. **Romulus myth:** Plut. *Rom.* 13. 1-2; Vell. Pat. 1. 8. 5; Livy *praef.* 7. **Robbers:** Plut. *Rom.* 6. 2-3; Livy 1. 4. 9; Eutr. 1. 1-3.

that a reluctant Jupiter was obliged to sanction. The epic ends with Aeneas' slaughter of the defeated Turnus, a character treated more negatively by Virgil than by Livy. It seems possible that the factor at work in this distinction was the poet's aim to promote relevant Augustan ideology; in this case a desire to legitimise the revenge/civil war aspects of Augustus' actions. In this way a handling of Rome's past was used to confirm the centrality of war and violence in contemporary politics.⁵⁶

Alongside accounts of the mythic origins of the Roman state, later authors provided explanations of the City's political and sociological development. These placed war and violence at the centre of the process. Livy went further, emphasising that war was integral even to the establishment of peaceful relations amongst the citizens of Rome. He portrayed the organisation of the population carried out by Servius Tullius, the legendary sixth king, in terms of the equation of wealth, privilege and political power on the one hand, with accompanying military responsibilities on the other. Beyond the military details of the census ratings, Livy set these measures in a double context that located war and violence at the core of Roman political institutions. First, he described the reorganisation as taking place at the same time as a war against Veii; a war regarded by the dominant elite as being, 'Most opportune for the tranquil preservation of the existing state of things', that is, a distraction from the internal conflict of non-elite challenges to their power. Second, the reorganisation itself was described as a 'most important work of peace'. Roman peace, then, was clearly depicted as being based on military organisation (see page 105). Livy also illustrated the central place of war in the *res publica* when he described its role during the power struggles between the plebeians and patricians in during the fifth century BCE. In response to demands by the former for access to the latter's political privileges, the patricians 'rejoiced to hear' that Rome was threatened by a number of external foes. They hoped that

'...the proposals of the tribunes might be silenced amidst the din of so many wars; and ordered levies to be held'.

The initial refusal of the plebeians to co-operate in these levies was itself viewed as another affront to the vital traditions of the state. A more direct role of military force in the political balance within Rome was demonstrated by Valerius Maximus when he described P. Scipio Aemilianus Africanus' response to unrest after the death of Ti.

⁵⁶ **Aeneas myth:** Livy 1. 1. 5, 1. 2-3; Griffin, J. p. 626-632. **Hera:** *Aen.* 7. 310-320. **Jupiter:** *ibid.* 10. 100-115. **Death of Turnus:** *ibid.* 12. 938-953; Stahl p. 176-177, 202-203.

Gracchus. Scipio defied popular sentiment in favour of the Tribune, arguing that his own military successes put him above opposition. Valerius Maximus added telling editorial comment to the effect that 'the chained necks of two kings' in Scipio's triumphal procession 'stopped the mouths of the entire Forum'. The political potency of military reputation was also noted in relation to the unusual adoption of consular authority in 210 BCE by that later Scipio's adoptive grandfather, also P. Scipio Africanus. This was a popular elevation that took place without the general's having held all the legally required preliminary magistracies. The established voting system that privileged the military elite, and departures from it could also be portrayed as deviant and subversive. For example, Coriolanus was represented as the victim of manipulation and plots when the tribunes determined that his trial should be decided on the votes of the tribes, dominated by the 'indigent and officious rabble', rather than the Servian centuries that favoured the '...wealthy and well known citizens of the military class'. In a general way, it does not seem to be exaggerated or unreasonable to describe the idealised Republican arrangement as a '...perfect congruity between the political and the military structure of the city-state', or to characterise the whole of that supposed legal/political constitution as the 'military justification'.⁵⁷

Of course, it is more than likely that this story of arrangements amongst the original inhabitants of the City is just that, a story with no substantial historical basis. This need not detract from the relevance of the account to a perception of the military ethos of Roman society. Modern attempts to reconcile ancient descriptions of the Servian organisation of the Roman population with theories about the likely sociological realities of the City's development have come to negative conclusions. The divisions in society implied by the Servian system have been thought more likely to represent political and fiscal structures than to indicate primarily military concerns. Support for a multifaceted interpretation can be found in the different meanings of the key Servian term '*centuria*'. Besides its application to military organisation, it also referred to voting units in an assembly and to a measure of agricultural land. In fact, the arrangements attributed to the penultimate king have been perceptively identified as reflecting rather than shaping later legionary organisation. However, discussion of the

⁵⁷ **Servius Tullius:** Livy 1. 42. 2-43. 11; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4. 16-21. **Patricians and plebeians:** Livy 4. 1; Richardson p. 5. **Scipio:** Val. Max. 6. 2. 3; Plut. *Mor.* 805A. **Coriolanus:** Plut *Cor.* 20. 2. **Political/military congruity:** Carrié p. 102; Gabba p. 20. **'Military justification':** Brand p. 10-12.

matter has tended to focus on the detailed applicability of the Servian reforms to any practical form of social organisation. Scepticism about this idea has nevertheless placed those changes in the context of earlier forms of military structure, thus confirming the centrality of the role of soldiers. Practical demonstrations of the inseparable relationship in Rome between political power and military preoccupations are readily identifiable. Perhaps the ceremony of the triumph provided the most spectacular example; the victorious general, preceded by lictors carrying the *fascēs*, the symbols of political authority (see pages 157-164), parading defeated captives through the centre of the City, the whole celebration governed by ancient religious ritual. At a more mundane level, the procedure marking the official end of an *eques'* period of military participation took place in the forum, thus linking the political heart of the City with military organisation. What is more, the importance of such a tradition was emphasised by its potential usefulness in politically symbolic acts. This was demonstrated in 71 BCE when Pompey, already a double *triumphator*, recently elected consul and soon to be the most powerful man in the state, surprised everyone by a show of fidelity to *mos maiorum*, personally leading his horse before the censors to participate in the *equites'* ceremony.⁵⁸

The traditional ideal of a hierarchy of citizens, based on the Servian census, and reflected both in political privileges and military responsibilities, should not obscure the fact that the whole population of Rome shared a duty to bear arms in some appropriate manner. As in so many aspects of Rome's culture, its development in this respect is not best viewed in geographical isolation. While there was considerable variation between locations and over time, it has been concluded that military training and participation for war were strongly related to citizenship in the Hellenistic kingdoms. For example, in Boiotia a citizen militia, divided into a number of specialized units, remained in existence until domination by Rome was completed in the second century BCE. In Rome itself, although excluded from the five *classes*, the *proletarii* were always expected to fight when needed. Even priests were not excused from this duty should the conceivably worst be threatened, that is, an occupation by the Gauls, as had happened in 390 BCE. Josephus, whose information about Roman

⁵⁸ Non-military concerns: Kunkel p. 11. *Centuria*: Schiavone p. 55; Lewis and Short p. 316. *Legionary organisation*: Fraccaro, cited by Cornell (1995) p. 181-183. *Military structures*: *ibid.* p. 189. *Triumph*: OCD3 p. 1554. *Fascēs*: see pages 157-164. *Equites*: Plut. *Pomp.* 22. 4-6.

behaviour was often more flattering than reliable, nevertheless emphasised a general preparedness for war, specifically noting that even the camp followers and soldiers' servants were a match for most other peoples in military prowess. The potentially all-embracing nature of Roman warfare could be evoked in apparently incidental details. Thus, during the darkest days of the Social War, characterised by defeats and slain consuls, military dress was said to have replaced normal clothing in the City. In the general context of ancient warfare it seems quite fair to identify as a Roman ideal that of the citizen-soldier, possessing an indivisible mix of duties and privileges linking military and political behaviour. First century BCE laws to this effect have been exemplified in municipal charters such as that of Heraclea. An inscribed version of this law laid down a minimum period of military experience required before a young man could hold political office. Far from representing a mere qualification for political office, the 'military justification' can be seen to have been at the root of social power in Rome. Plutarch gave plausibility to the idea that the effective element in the consul's authority was its military dimension. In the opening of his *Camillus*, he described a period during which social tensions in the City made it impossible for the post of consul to be filled; instead the authority necessary for the functioning of the state was vested in military tribunes. Truly, 'In Roman eyes, a soldier and a citizen were the same thing'. However real this model may have been in Rome's early history, by the second century BCE it was beginning to be replaced by another, but one equally marked by military colouring.⁵⁹

Pressure for widening the scope of the population's military involvement may well have come from the effects on recruitment of longer, less profitable and more dangerous campaigns, such as those in Spain, Macedonia and countering slave revolts. The property qualification for legionary status, reduced in 214 BCE, was lowered further during the second century. The change implied by these adjustments probably took place over a period as long as one hundred years. It was most likely as a stage in this development, rather than as a dramatic individual initiative, that Marius was said to have broken with 'traditional custom'. For his African campaign in 107 BCE he officially recruited volunteers from the *proletarii*. It is important to stress here that

⁵⁹ **Hellenistic kingdoms:** Chaniotis p. 20-26. **Boiotia:** *ibid.* p. 22. **Proletarii:** Gabba p. 2. **Priests:** Plut. *Marc.* 3. 2. **Camp followers:** Joseph. *BJ* 3. 69-70. **Military dress:** Vell. *Pat.* 2. 16. 4. **Law:** Lewis and Reinhold 1. 162. **Military tribunes:** Plut. *Cam.* 1. 1. **Citizen-soldier:** Nicolet p. 93; Garlan p. 86-89.

these changes should not be seen as reducing the association between political power and the military ethos of Roman society. A tendency to do so can perhaps be detected in the anachronistic language used to describe the military activity of Roman citizens. References to individuals being 'called up' to perform 'military service' evoke the modern concept of a separation between civil and military roles, the latter generally characterised as an exceptional interruption to normal life. Any such distancing of politics and soldiers was certainly not reflected in the decades following Marius' military reforms. Successive civil wars were fought between Marius, Sulla, Pompey, Julius Caesar, his assassins, Antony and Octavian, each employing what amounted to private armies. Eventually, after 31 BCE, the last named established firm personal control. The sequence of events during these years is too complex and well documented to require repetition here, and it is acknowledged that broad, long-term and multifaceted social factors were almost certainly involved. However, the extent to which overt military coercion operated as the vehicle of social power can be illustrated from a few sketched-in details, while the continued prominence of soldiers as the source of political authority in Rome was demonstrated in the methods by which the first *princeps* established and maintained his dominance.⁶⁰

Most representative of the role of military coercion in this period were the occasions on which the struggle for political power involved the seizure by soldiers of Rome itself. Sulla was described as the first to do so 'by force of arms', in fact carrying out the coup on two occasions, in 88 and 83 BCE. Between these episodes, in 87, his rivals, Cinna and Marius, also besieged and captured the City. The outrageous and unprecedented nature of these events was reflected in Appian's language, as he lamented that '...the first army of her own citizens had invaded Rome as a hostile country', and in details such as that only one of the senior officers from his six legions had joined Sulla in his first attempt to gain control of the City; the others '...would not submit to the idea of leading an army against their country'. In addition to the uniquely violent act of seizing Rome itself, each of these military takeovers was accompanied by unusually savage proscriptions. Sulla was credited with the dubious distinction of being the first dominant individual to draw up a formal list of political opponents

⁶⁰ **Less attractive campaigns/reduced property qualification:** Campbell (2002b) p. 23-24. **Marius:** Sall. *Iug.* 86; Carrié p. 106-113; Momigliano p. 1. **Anachronism:** Campbell (2002a) p. 168. **Private armies:** App. *B Civ.* 1. 34, 1. 55; Shotter p. 31-32; Syme (1939) p. 15. **Social factors:** Eder (1996) p. 441-447.

condemned to death. Debate, ancient and modern, about Sulla's motives for his unprecedented steps has centred on traditionally recognised factors; his response to the affront to his *dignitas* when deprived of the Asian command in 88 and his duty driven assumption of supreme authority to bring about changes he saw as necessary for the well-being of the *res publica*. How important these factors may have been, or to what extent he was attempting to establish some sort of permanent autocracy, are not the issues here. Rather, as identified by Plutarch, what distinguished Sulla were his chosen methods; remaining in continuous military command and employing calculated violence to coerce opponents and public alike. This pattern was repeated, although with less immediate blood-letting, in Julius Caesar's retention of his provincial commands, crossing of the Rubicon and occupation of Rome. It is noteworthy that Appian's accounts of the various occupations of Rome by soldiers gradually become less dramatic and his language more matter-of-fact. Antony's entry in 44 BCE was said to have been carried out in a 'haughty manner'. Although he left some of his soldiers outside the walls, those that accompanied him were 'girded as for war', and the historian comments that they behaved in the City 'just as in camp.' Less than fifty years after the initial seizure of the City by Sulla, the act could be normalised to the extent that a low key report appeared appropriate. Thus,

'...the triumvirs entered the City separately on three successive days, Octavian, Antony and Lepidus, each with his Praetorian cohort and one legion. As they arrived, the City was speedily filled with arms and military standards, disposed in the most advantageous places'.

However, the atmosphere of military occupation cannot be missed, and it is significant that Appian's continues immediately with an account of the triumvirs' proscriptions.⁶¹

At the level of political symbolism, coercive military representations can be seen to have become more prominent during this period, particularly those depicting the dominance of a particular individual. For example, as a special honour, Hellenistic kings could be portrayed in the form of a life sized equestrian statue, usually depicting the monarch either naked or in military splendour. Although attested by epigraphy,

⁶¹ **Sulla:** App. *B Civ.* 1. 57-60, 87-98. **Cinna and Marius:** ibid. 1. 67-71. **Foreign country:** ibid. 1. 57, 60. **Proscriptions:** Vell. Pat. 2. 22. 1, 28. 3; App. *B Civ.* 1. 60, 71, 95-96. Plut. *Sull.* 31. **List:** App. *B Civ.* 1. 95. **Motives:** Vell. Pat. 2. 18. 4-19. 1; App. *B Civ.* 1. 57; Keaveney p. 163-165; OCD3 p. 401. **Methods:** Plut. *Synk. Lys. and Sull.* 1. 4; App. *B Civ.* 2. 32, 35, 40. **Antony:** ibid. 3. 45. **Triumvirs:** ibid. 4. 7.

only miniaturised fragments of these survive. Related Roman examples can be seen in the naked first century CE prince in the British Museum (**Plate 2 i**), while the most famous surviving image that gives an idea of such a monument is that of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius on the Capitol in Rome (**Plate 2 ii**). Clearly by Marcus' day this depiction of a Roman ruler was perfectly acceptable. It is notable that no similar statue had been officially sanctioned before that of Sulla in the 80s BCE, and that the first senatorially authorised monument to Octavian, dating from January 43 BCE, was of this type.⁶²

The struggles for power during the first century BCE have most usually been portrayed as representing a watershed in Roman politics. Depicted as a period in which the dominance of military force went unchecked by any other form of authority, these events have been seen as demonstrating the failure of 'constitutional' government by the senate and people of Rome. This analysis was certainly prominent in our ancient sources. A sense of collapse and internal decay is palpable in Lucan's epic poem of the *res publica* undermined by Julius Caesar and his rivals. The overwhelming detail of Appian's account of the proscriptions carried out by the second triumvirate contains a graphic portrayal of social disintegration. In fact the evidence cited in this section demonstrates that the civil wars are more realistically perceived as a different manifestation of the coercive principles that had always characterised Roman government. The continuity of this process is evident in the already described ethos of Roman rule prior to the first century BCE and in the nature of the regime established by Augustus and his successors. A single image, as chilling as it is telling and self-explanatory, demonstrates the span of this continuity. At the outset of Julius Caesar's break with the traditional authority structure in Rome, Plutarch described a dramatic scene in which one of the general's centurions confronted the senate. On learning of that body's refusal to extend Caesar's military command, the soldier 'slapped the handle of his sword and said, "But this will give it"'. At the other end of the period covered by this thesis are images of emperors portrayed in the very act described by Plutarch (**Plate 3**).⁶³

⁶² **Equestrian statues:** Smith (1988) p. 33; (1991) p. 19; Zanker (1988) p. 5-6, 37-38.

⁶³ **Failure of SPQR:** For example by Syme (1939) p. 100, but note the date of this work and the relevance of contemporary European political developments, such as the failure of parliamentary government in Germany, **Lucan:** 1. 70-97; OCD3 p. 94-95. **Appian:** *B Civ.* 4. 5-51, 13-14. **Sword:** Plut. *Caes.* 29. 5.



(i) Naked prince



(ii) Marcus Aurelius

(i) Venice
Tetrarchs



(ii) Ravenna
unknown
emperor

The Empire

The role of coercion in the development of political authority in Augustan and Imperial Rome has an equivocal position in modern scholarship. On the one hand, the employment of violence and military force to gain and maintain power forms an inescapably large proportion of the substance of the period's history. In addition, the evolution from Republic to Empire has been characterised as a transformation of the ideals of the Roman ruling elite from those of liberty to those of obedience. While this description is clearly an over-simplification, it may well be reasonable to view any such a change in terms of the dominance/subservience imperatives so embedded in the Roman ethos. In that sense, the shift from Republic to Empire could be viewed as the emperors' appropriation of the traditional Roman psychology of domination over other peoples (to be explored in chapter five), transforming it into a psychology of their personal domination over all other individuals, Roman and barbarian. On the other hand, the role of military coercion in the fundamentals of Imperial authority has tended to be overlain in much modern scholarship by the function of other factors, such as religion, art and law (see chapter six). What follows will exemplify the processes by which force and coercion were central to the development of the emperors' political authority. Continuities will be evident from the Republic, as will be the changes that necessarily reflected the emergence of a more openly and legitimised autocratic form of government.⁶⁴

John Stuart Mill took a dim view of the direction in which Augustus had taken the *res publica*:

‘The despotism of Augustus prepared the Romans for Tiberius. If the whole tone of their character had not first been prostrated by nearly two generations of that mild slavery, they would probably have had spirit enough left to rebel against the more odious one.’

These sentiments, of course, echoed those of Tacitus. Without doubt a major factor in the establishment of this ‘despotism’ was the transformation that Augustus brought about in Rome's military organisation and the political role of soldiers. In outlining the first *princeps*' troop dispositions, Suetonius opened his account with a phrase generally translated as some variation of, ‘From his military forces’. While it is the case that the

⁶⁴ **Liberty/obedience:** Garnsey p. 409-410. **Other factors:** Alston (1999) p. 176.

biographer's general method was to personalise all aspects of his subjects' activities, the translations emphasise Augustus' personal control even though the Latin contains no specifically emphatic possessive pronoun. Perhaps in this respect there has been an unconscious recognition that the biographer's perspective represented a new level of autocracy. Suetonius also devoted considerable attention to the *princeps*' bodyguard and security forces in and around Rome. The changes made to soldiers' pay and conditions of service were described in terms of their effect on securing Augustus' position and the establishment of a regularised taxation based system of payment and veteran settlement. Sociological analysis has characterised such arrangements as a bureaucratisation of the army. Crucially this pattern involves a shift from the duty/privilege of individual soldiers to arm and equip themselves to the assumption of this role by the 'state'; in turn this is associated with the military function passing from the propertied to those without property in any society. As we have seen (pages 50-51), aspects of these changes had been underway in Rome for a century or more. Nevertheless there is no denying the extent to which the alterations were systematised under Augustus. Note should be taken of the manner in which Augustus cemented the political loyalty of soldiers to himself, his family and to a generalised Imperial awareness. The pronounced military character of the decoration of his new forum can be cited, as can the adoption of military religious rites centred on 'Eternal Rome' and 'Augustan Victory'. It does not seem unreasonable to see in this process the propagation among soldiers of '...a generally responsible attitude that we could call civic'. More directly, Augustus showed no reluctance to mobilise veterans as voters. On a more personal level, he emphasised an association with the military by his adoption in 38 BCE of the *praenomen imperatoris*, while in the arrangements of 23 BCE the distinction was blurred between military and civil power when his *imperium proconsulare* was extended to the City of Rome.⁶⁵

In the light of this evidence, it would appear to be misleading to describe Augustus' military changes as amounting to a 'depoliticisation' of the army. In the context of the preceding civil wars such an assessment can seem plausible. There is no doubt that Augustus intended to make it harder for any aspiring rival from within the elite to use

⁶⁵ **Augustus/Tiberius:** Mill p. 53; Tac *Ann.* 1. 1-11. **Reorganisation:** Suet. *Aug.* 49; OCD3 p. 1592. **Bureaucratisation:** Weber (1968) p. 980. **Gradual change:** Raaflaub (1980) p. 1006. **Forum:** Richardson p. 9. **Religion and 'civic' attitude:** Carrié p. 111. **Veterans:** Raaflaub (1980) p. 1007. **Imperator and imperium proconsulare:** Eder (1990) p. 94, 106-107; OCD3 p. 752.

soldiers to challenge his newly established political authority; hence the greater use of equestrian officers and family members in positions of military command. However, Augustus' aims and actions cannot be characterised as taking the army out of politics; rather they represented a refinement of the army's role in politics, limiting it to the active and reliable support of the new regime. Although he was described, predictably enough, as not being deficient in the kingly virtues of clemency and moderation, the same accounts indicated that Augustus had not hesitated to employ the violence of proscription and torture when he felt threatened. It is indeed quite likely that he became more magnanimous as his position became more secure; near contemporary assessments could be positive. However, presented as the opinion of others, Tacitus' judgement was severe, citing 'proscription' and 'killing' as characteristics of the regime. In as much as any over-all judgement can encapsulate the complexities of his 44 years of domination, it does not seem unreasonable to describe the rule of Augustus as '...an authoritarian regime founded on absolute control of the army'.⁶⁶

Whether or not the above is a fair summary of Augustus' regime, during his period of domination political power in Rome steadily took on more of the features of an autocracy. One of these was fear of assassination, some of the general aspects of which will be treated later (see pages 121-123). For the moment it suffices to point out that Augustus and his successors increasingly took measures ostensibly to protect their persons from direct attack, measures which also provided Roman rulers with an enhanced capability for the offensive employment of violence in political contexts. Attached to an account of Augustus' purge of the senate in 28 BCE, Suetonius described the *princeps* as nervously wearing a cuirass and surrounding himself with ten strong senatorial friends. In the same context, the biographer also referred to Cremutius Cordus as reporting of Augustus that

'...no member of the senate was allowed to approach him unless on his own and once his toga had been searched'.

At the end of his rule, Augustus could appear so secure in his control that Tacitus commented of the *princeps* that he was 'without a single adversary'. Can it be coincidental that by then he had established a formidable force of soldiers and

⁶⁶ 'Depoliticisation': Raaflaub (1980) p. 1009. **Restricted commands:** Crook p. 114; Raaflaub (1980) p. 1016-1019. **Clemency/Violence:** Suet. *Aug.* 51, 53, 27. **Magnanimity/positive assessments:** Yavetz (1990) p. 34; Vell. *Pat.* 2. 86. 2. **Murders:** Tac. *Ann.* 1. 10. **Authoritarianism:** Carrié p. 102.

paramilitary personnel in the City of Rome? In fact, reign by reign, there was a steady increase in both the fear of the assassin and the consequent militarization of the emperor's entourage.⁶⁷

The offensive side of this militarisation was represented by proscriptions of the emperors' political opponents, increasingly defined as anyone who actually challenged or who might be thought capable of challenging their authority. This theme provided a substantial part of the sombre tonality of all Tacitus' accounts of the Julio-Claudian principates. The deliberateness of this characterisation is clear from the intentional repetition of his descriptions of political executions, and from their placement at the very outset of different regimes and of the extant openings of his Books. As if the scheme needed underlining, at a point of dramatic and literary significance within his narrative, Tacitus provided a typically arch apology for the dullness and monotony of his depictions of executions and assassinations (see pages 181-2 for further discussion). Certainly, violent death within the elite in general, and amongst the reigning emperor's family or other potential successors in particular, might be said to have overshadowed other aspects of Tacitus' narrative. The desire of the emperors to eliminate all real or perceived rivals seemed to be matched by their power to effect this outcome. The fact that most of the Julio-Claudians were themselves assassinated, or at least had their deaths hastened by violent means, need not detract from a view that their political authority was principally characterised by defensive and offensive physical coercion. It is the concern of this thesis to demonstrate the nature of Imperial Roman regimes, not to comment on their success or failure.⁶⁸

It had been Augustus who had harnessed the previously rather vague application of the *maiestas* laws (concerning crimes that 'diminished the majesty of the Roman people'), attaching the concept to the person of the reigning *princeps*. Trials under those laws increased under Tiberius, initially involving the substantial prosecution of defendants who were probably or at least possibly guilty, such as Piso and Libo, but later extending to the summary condemnation of the clearly innocent, for example Quintus Servaeus and Minucius Thermus. Amidst the apparently indiscriminate and capricious

⁶⁷ **Fear of assassination:** MacMullen (1966) p. 2; Suet. *Aug.* 35; Cass. Dio 54. 12. 3, 58. 18. 5, 60. 3. 2; Nippel (1995) p. 92-93. **No opposition:** Tac. *Ann.* 1. 2. 1. **Military in Rome:** see pages 128-137.

⁶⁸ **Deaths as openings:** Tac. *Ann.* 1. 6. 1, 12. 1. 1, 13. 1. 1. **Repetitious deaths:** ibid. 4. 32. 1-33. 3.

slaughter of the elite attributed to Gaius, he was still credited with an awareness of the source of his power. The Emperor was said to have warned his exiled sisters that 'he possessed swords as well as islands'. Claudius earned lasting condemnation because of his proscriptions of senators and *equites*, while neither friends nor family of Nero, let alone his political opponents, were safe from attack. When circumstances indicated that his fears of opponents were justified, such as the discovery of C. Calpurnius Piso's plot in 65 CE, Nero could be described as substantially occupying Rome and the surrounding area with troops.⁶⁹

Subsequent regimes, such as that of Domitian, were portrayed in similarly bloody terms. Tacitus and Pliny the Younger survived what they described as 'the killing of so many consulars' and '...the massacre and destruction of (Domitian's) most distinguished subjects', so perhaps their condemnations were laced with more than the usual amount of personal feeling. Thirty years after the events, Suetonius concurred with the depiction of proscriptions within the same Imperial family and wider elite, as did Cassius Dio a hundred years later. The reign of Trajan could be presented plainly as the positive alternative to Domitian's excesses of coercion. However, it must be remembered that even the adulatory Pliny had openly employed the Imperial epithet '*Optimus*', with its traditional application to Jupiter himself, thus acknowledging the Emperor's overwhelming power, while modern scholarship has suggested that

'...Trajan's rule was no less and perhaps more autocratic than that espoused by the detested Domitian.'

Although fewer of the elite died in proscriptions, executions did occur at his accession in 98 CE (see page 119). At the outset of his own reign, Hadrian denied involvement in the condemnation and execution of four consulars accused of plotting to assassinate the Emperor. This summary justice may have been in response to actual treason and may indeed have been carried out by the order of the senate, although Hadrian's involvement must be suspected.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ **Augustus and *maiestas***: Levick (1999a) p. 183-194; Cass. Dio 56. 27. 1; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 10. 3. **Increase under Tiberius**: Levick (1999a) p. 195. **Libo and Piso**: Tac. *Ann.* 2. 27-31; 3. 10-15. **Servaeus and Thermus**: *ibid.* 6. 7. 2. **Gaius**: Suet. *Cal.* 29. **Claudius**: Sen. *Apocol.* 14. **Nero**: Rudich p. xxvii; Tac. *Ann.* 15. 58. 2.

⁷⁰ **Domitian**: Tac. *Agr.* 25; Plin. *Pan.* 48. 3; Suet. *Dom.* 10, 15; Cass. Dio 77. 14. 1-3. **Contrast with Domitian**: Bennett p. 56. ***Optimus*/autocracy**: Plin. *Pan.* 88. 5-8; Liebeschuetz (2000) p. 988; Bennett p. 208. **Executions**: Cass. Dio 78. 5. 4. **Hadrian**: HA *Hadrian* 7. 1-2; Birley (1997) p. 87-88.

Within the pattern of response described here, it must be conceded that an emperor could behave in a quite different manner. However, it is equally clear from our sources that such an aberration confirmed rather than undermined the general model. In the aftermath of the revolt of Avidius Cassius in 175 CE, our ancient accounts agree that Marcus Aurelius made explicit efforts to avoid any major reprisals against those thought to be involved. At the crucial time, the Emperor was campaigning on the Danube. From the standpoint of this thesis it is interesting that Cassius Dio appeared to be perfectly at ease in reporting the substance of Marcus' response as a long speech to the assembled troops, thus raising the political profile of soldiers, while merely mentioning that a letter to the senate had contained the same injunction regarding clemency. That Marcus should have taken such a forgiving attitude to the revolt could have reflected his opinion that it was not a serious affair. However, the evidence suggests otherwise. Even another story illustrating the Emperor's restraint suggests the potential seriousness of the situation. Marcus was said to have burned unread letters of the rebel that could have incriminated others, their existence confirming the widespread nature of the plot. Avidius had been governor of Syria, with the control of powerful legions entailed in that post (evoking Vespasian and G. Licinius Mucianus in 69 CE); in addition since 172 Avidius had had enhanced powers over the whole of the eastern Empire. News of the revolt had caused Marcus to make a hasty and unwilling peace with the Iazyges and to summon to his side from Rome his son, Commodus. Our sources and later historians give more emphasis to the Emperor's unique general character in explaining his merciful approach. It was consonant with his Stoic philosophy, with the virtuous nature ascribed to him and with his own recorded words:

'If a man makes a slip, admonish him gently and show him his mistake.

If you fail to convince him, blame yourself, or else blame nobody'.

Some later assessments perhaps contained the seeds of doubt as to whether such a determinedly virtuous man was indeed the model for a successful emperor. However, the consensus was and remains positive about Marcus' exceptional qualities, and in respect of clemency he was used as a positive exemplar by, for instance, Ammianus. Yet it should be added that non-senators did suffer the death penalty for their complicity in Avidius' revolt and measures were put in place to protect the autocracy embodied, however worthily, in the person of Marcus Aurelius. Note was taken of the

Syrian origins and power base of Avidius; it was decreed that no one should be appointed as governor of his native province.⁷¹

In general, subsequent emperors did not emulate the lenient, forgiving attitude of Marcus towards real or potential threats to their rule; certainly not his son, Commodus. He was said to have gone to the other extreme after the abortive assassination attempt by Quintianus in 182 CE. During his assault on the Emperor, this young member of the senate had declared that he was acting in the name of that body. According to Herodian, Commodus '...now considered the entire senate his collective enemy'. Cassius Dio chose to confirm this assessment, and the Emperor's savage response, at a significant point in his history, that at which he claimed first hand observation to be his source rather than the accounts of others. Commodus was accused of killing

'...practically all those who had attained eminence during his father's reign and his own.'

The same historian ascribed a similar attitude to Septimius Severus. He was said to have promoted his dynastic credentials by styling himself as not only encouragingly 'son of Marcus', but more alarmingly as 'brother of Commodus'. This was in marked contrast, for example, to the rejection of any Flavian legacy by the successors of Domitian, as evidenced by their coinage. Severus defended the actions of Commodus, openly praising the '...severity and cruelty of Marius, Sulla and Augustus as the safer course', rather than the clemency of other rulers. In line with these sentiments, Severus began by executing those of the plotters against Commodus who remained alive, then continued with 'harsh vengeance for Albinus' revolt by putting many men to death'. On arriving in Rome, according to Cassius Dio, Severus had taken the now standard oath not to kill any senators but immediately broke it '...and made away with many senators'; a round figure of fifty was identified in the SHA. Executions of senators followed throughout the reign. Although an incomplete sentence in our source, the construction used by Cassius Dio referring to these killings does so in a way that justifies an emphasis on the translation's first word,

⁷¹ **Marcus' response:** Cass. Dio 71. 24. 1-27. 2. **Avidius' threat:** Amm. Marc. 21. 16. 11; OCD3 p. 226. **Iazyges and Commodus:** Cass. Dio 71. 17, 22. 2. **Stoicism and virtue:** Birley (1987) p. 192; Cass. Dio 71. 34. 2- 5; Herodian 1. 2; Julian *Caes.* 328D, 335C; M. Aur. *Med.* 10. 4, (see also 9. 42). **Later doubts:** 'a man one might more easily admire than praise' (Eutr. 8. 11). **Exemplar:** Amm. Marc. 21. 16. 11; Kelly, G. p. 409. **Deaths and counter measures:** SHA *Marc.* 25. 7; Birley (1987) p. 192.

‘...some of them after they had been duly accused before him, had made their defence, and been convicted...’

with the missing, though presumable, continuation that others had not been dealt with by such regular legal process. As a fitting climax that reflected the prevailing atmosphere of his account, the historian told the story of Baebius Marcellinus. He was condemned in 206 CE at least in part because he possessed the physical characteristic fitting a vague accusation that had been made against an otherwise unidentified ‘bald senator’. Dio milked the black humour of the event with the detail that, as a senator himself, he had furtively felt his own head for reassurance that he was not the accused.⁷²

Beyond the use of political murders, other aspects of Septimius Severus’ rule serve to introduce illustrations of the typically coercive nature of Imperial regimes. At the outset of his reign, he made it abundantly clear that his power rested on his control of the soldiers and that he meant that control to be total. Before even entering Rome in 193, Severus discharged the Praetorian Guard, accusing its members of disloyalty in the overthrow of Pertinax earlier in the same year. The new Emperor replaced them with a bodyguard drawn from his own Illyrian troops. Severus then entered the City with his entire army in battle array. Cassius Dio attempted to soften the message of this behaviour (indicating that the Emperor himself dismounted and put on civilian dress, and that the citizens viewed the occasion in a festive manner). Other accounts seem more credible. Herodian referred to the ‘fear and panic’ engendered by the situation, while the SHA described ‘hate and fear’ as the soldiers ‘threatened to lay the City waste’. Caracalla went further than his father, further perhaps than any other emperor not emerging from the legions themselves, in his active cultivation of the political goodwill of his soldiers. This was achieved by a combination of activities identifying himself with their lifestyle, and by actions that clearly signalled their importance to his authority. In the first category were included such extreme behaviours as carrying the legionary standard, and emulating the low quality dress and minimal personal hygiene of soldiers. In the second, he frequently appeared to go out of his way to demonstrate to the senators that he relied not on them, but on the support of his soldiers to maintain

⁷² **Commodus:** SHA *Comm.* 4. 2-3; Cass. Dio 72. 4. 1-2. **Severus and Commodus:** Cass. Dio 75. 7. 4-8. 1; *ibid.* 74. 16. 5. **Albinus:** SHA *Sev.* 12. 7. **Oath:** Cass. Dio 75. 2. 1-2; SHA *Sev.* 13. 1-8. **senators:** Cass. Dio 76. 7. 3-9. 2.

his power. On one occasion he wrote to the senate a mocking explanation of his behaviour, saying that he was well aware that it would displease its members

‘...but that is why I have weapons and soldiers, so that I may disregard those that are talking about me’.

The effect on the soldiers of this sort of attention from their leader has been identified as enhancing their self-perception as power brokers, an awareness that sharpened during the following century.⁷³

It should be added that for Roman rulers, as for others in a similar position, there were dangers in the use of proscription and a need to clothe their domination in socially acceptable garb. In the most direct terms, Domitian’s assassination was said to have been precipitated by a leakage of information that the Emperor had plans to execute those plotting his downfall. The provincial legions, and particularly their commanders, must have been all the more ready to overthrow Nero in 68 CE after he had forced the most renowned soldier of the day, C. Domitius Corbulo, to commit suicide two years previously. The pattern continued, as illustrated by the SHA’s comments on the rule of Aurelian in the second half of the third century. The praise he had earned for his wars against barbarians was negated by his violent and vengeful proscription of senators. As a result ‘...men ceased to love and began to fear an excellent prince’. Herodian had made similar comments about the reign of Maximinus fifty years earlier, adding the rider that an emperor could act against individuals with relative impunity, but risked all when his excesses enraged the general citizens. As a theoretical axiom of coercive power, the ruler will act to favour those upon whom he relies for his domination, and will be relatively exploitative of others. However, in relation to Maximinus, Herodian indicated the limitations of this approach. He stated that the Emperor could not even ensure his security by disproportionately favouring the interests of soldiers over those of civilians, since:

‘The soldiers too were disgusted with his activities, for their relatives and fellow citizens complained that he was acting solely for the benefit of the military.’

⁷³ **Praetorians:** Cass. Dio 75. 1. 1-2; Herodian 2. 13. **Entry to Rome:** Cass. Dio 75. 1. 3-5; Herodian 2. 14. 1; SHA *Sev.* 7. 3; Birley (1988) p. 103-104; Campbell (1984) p. 402. **Caracalla:** Herodian 4. 7. 4-7, 12. 2; Cass. Dio 77. 20. 2. **Soldiers privileged over others:** Campbell (1984) p. 229. **Power brokers:** James (1999) p. 15-16.

Although not emphasised by the author, there is a clear indication here of soldiers acting to some extent as a responsible constituency of the *res publica*, rather than wholly out of short-term self-interest. In addition to the security of his regime, an emperor risked loosing his posthumous reputation through excessive use of proscription. In practice this could mean, for instance, that the senate could be reluctant to grant a dead emperor 'the usual honour' of deification. This occurred in the cases of Tiberius and Hadrian.⁷⁴

The difficulty of securing a regime by employing proscription and at the same time dealing with the problems that attended its use had long been recognised. In the first quarter of the fourth century BCE, Isocrates provided theoretical guidance to a young ruler, advising him to act firmly, but in a self-controlled and restrained manner, when faced by recalcitrant subjects. An historical model of such government had perhaps been available to the Romans in the form of the empire of the Seleucids. In its diverse geographical and social make up, that regime was perhaps the nearest approximation to Imperial Rome among the Hellenistic kingdoms. Based on the policies of their predecessors, the kings of Achaemenid Persia, the Seleucid monarchs attempted with some success to manage potential political rivals. This was achieved by a judicious mixture of grants of high status allied to limited independence of action, and an efficient network for the centralised gathering of information. In terms of the basic theory of government, this 'socialising' of coercive power has been described as an identifying feature of the organised political state. Nevertheless, the fact remains that in relation to the distribution of power in a society, any such 'socialising' is essentially a secondary process; the actual bases of authority retain their coercive essence. The importance of the control and display of weapons as signs of power has been discussed, for example, by Foucault. Physical manifestations of this phenomenon could hardly have been more prominent in Imperial Rome (**Plate 4**). In relation to the base of Trajan's Column it seems unlikely to be coincidental that the Trajanic orations of Dio Chrysostom included a fictional exchange between Alexander the Great and his father in which the former specifically endorsed military architectural decoration, in preference to gold or other ornament. The second century CE rhetoric of Aelius

⁷⁴ **Domitian:** Cass. Dio 67. 15. 2-4. **Nero:** Tac. *Hist.* 2. 76; Griffin (1984) p. 178. **Aurelian:** SHA *Aurel.* 21. 5-7. **Maximinus:** Herodian 7. 3. 1-6. **Theory:** Levi p. 439. **Deification:** Price (1987) p. 86-87; Cass. Dio 59. 3. 7, 69. 23. 3.



Aristides could not have been clearer in its characterisation of the army as the Empire's 'greatest work of perfection'.⁷⁵

Conclusion

Coercive rule and a military ethos have been identified as twin characteristics of the developing political process in Rome. Although our direct evidence in no way extends to the beginnings of the City, there seems to be little reason to question this aspect of the basic story told in the extant sources about early Roman political organisation. From these and from the accounts of the Imperial period there is a continuity of essentially military regimes. These were manifested in varying forms, all based on the coercive power of soldiers, harnessed and manipulated by an elite, whose members were driven by the psychological need to compete with and to dominate their peers. These two elements, soldiers and would-be dominators, combined to feed a culture of coercion in which an emperor could brook no rival. As we will see (pages 88-90), even in circumstances when there were two or more co-emperors it was always clear that one was pre-eminent. In modern sociological analysis, to attain this end the ruler had to monopolise control of the forces of coercion. It was the achievement of Augustus that he reorganised and systematised the state's relationship with its soldiers in such a way as to create a durable basis for the rule of succeeding autocrats. Over time, the increasingly transparent nature of this autocracy can be seen to have a direct impact on the emperor's bond with his soldiers, for example, increasing the importance of his personal leadership on campaign.⁷⁶

The emperors' reliance on military coercion to establish and maintain their dominance developed within a political culture in which a far wider group of individuals had previously competed for a limited version of that dominant position. To an extent the early forms of this competition had been regulated within the collective control of the Republican oligarchy. However, during the first century BCE this regulation had largely broken down, adding yet more value to an aspiring leader's direct control of the forces of coercion, and therefore to the soldiers' status as a political constituency. One result of this situation was that an emperor could seldom feel safe from challenge;

⁷⁵ **Restraint:** Isoc. *Ad Nic.* 23. **Seleucids:** Shipley p. 293-294. **'Socialising' coercion:** Poggi p. 5; Foucault (1974) p. 41. **Dio Chrysostom:** *Or* 2. 34. **Aristides:** *Or* 26. 72-89; Birley (1997) p. 303.

⁷⁶ **Sociological analysis:** Levi (1981) p. 448-449. **Emperors on campaign:** Campbell (1984) p. 419-420.

which in turn provoked his use of coercive force to protect his position. As we have seen, even such apparently secure emperors as Marcus Aurelius could face serious threat. In fact, Herodian was led to comment on the 'complete security' experienced during the short reign of Macrinus just because of the rarity of such a situation. As a contemporary political paradigm, the emperors' violent proscription of perceived political rivals may well be over-represented in our sources because their authors were members of or close to the targeted social group. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests a pattern of sufficient clarity to be regarded as the norm.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ **Macrinus:** Herodian: 5. 2. 2.

5. Coercion: explanations, justifications and mechanisms.

Imperium, glory and coercion – Can they be separated?

Any view of the emperor's use of coercion in the establishment of his authority cannot reasonably be divorced from the operation of those factors in Roman society as a whole. The recourse to violence in pursuit of glory and status was personified by Sallust in the figure of Catiline. In a speech to potential followers, the revolutionary reminded his listeners that their natural desire for honour and glory had been stifled by those in charge of the state, obliging them to '...drag out lives of misery and dishonour as the playthings of other men's insolence'. He even stated that '...it is always they who receive tribute from foreign kings', thus linking motives of financial gain and a requirement for deference at the centre of legitimate ambition. From the point of view of soldiers' involvement in politics, it is noteworthy that in Plutarch's later account Catiline was said to have been specifically supported by the veterans of Sulla. Although described as being motivated by the desire for plunder, the former soldiers were portrayed as gathering in Rome, on their own initiative, with the express purpose of using their votes to help Catiline in the consular elections of 63 BCE.⁷⁸

Examining the issue from a positive perspective, Cicero identified *imperium* (defined as the legal exercise of executive power) as a key element in his perfect state. While the wielding of active authority had to be moderated by *consilium* (guidance based on *auctoritas*) and be in accordance with the basic *libertas* of the Roman people, it was nevertheless important that

'...the leading man of a state must be fed on glory, and the state can stand firm only so long as honour is given by all to their leader.'

The exercise of *imperium*, particularly by extending Rome's domination over more peoples, was seen as the surest route to such honour. In fact in his 'dream', Scipio was depicted as feeling scornful even of Rome's dominion on earth when he was led to contemplate the vastness of the starry heavens. In the parade of future Romans shown to Aeneas in the Underworld, Virgil emphasised the theme of *imperium*. The scene was climaxed by the active exhortation rather than passive prediction that to rule others was to be Rome's task. To achieve this it would be necessary

⁷⁸ Violence/Glory: Sall. *Cat.* 20; Plut. *Cic.* 14. 1-2.

‘...to impose a settled pattern upon peace, to pardon the defeated and war down the proud.’

Peace, perhaps, was to come; however, the prophecy left no doubt about the methods that were to be used in its attainment or upon whose terms it was to be established. Just as significant for the present thesis were Virgil’s references to the origins of authority within the Roman state itself. The power of Brutus, as the first consul, was immediately defined in relation to the ‘rods’ and ‘stern axes’ of office.⁷⁹

Dominance and subservience

Another reflection of this reality can perhaps be discerned from a passage in Suetonius regarding Nero Drusus, younger brother of Tiberius and father of the emperor Claudius. As Tacitus had also maintained, Drusus was said by the biographer to have had the open ambition of returning the State to the politics of the Republic. Suetonius, however, provided this information immediately after reference to another of the young man’s supposed ambitions, his desire to win the *spolia opima*, traditional reward for a Roman commander who personally killed an opposing barbarian leader in battle. Scholarly debate about this passage has centred on the veracity of the two claims. For my purposes it suffices that, whether deliberate or not, the juxtaposition of the two ideas links the status to be gained from a supremely violent act and thoughts about the nature of the Roman state.⁸⁰

Augustus’ *Res Gestae* provided significant, if not uncontroversial evidence on the importance of honours and the role of *imperium*. It can hardly be contested that one of the main elements of the work, perhaps its unifying thread, was the account of the offices held by Augustus and the honours granted to him by the grateful population of Rome. At the outset he seemed happy to discuss his military *imperium* in the context of what he characterised as his struggle for justified vengeance and foreign conquests. Indeed the work’s subtitle made the immodest claim that his exercise of such authority had ‘...brought the world under the empire of the Roman people’. However, it has been noted that one of the major titles/honours denoting his authority, that of *imperium proconsulare maius*, taken after 23 BCE, was absent from the *Res Gestae*. While it is

⁷⁹ *Imperium and law*: Cic. *Leg.* 3. 6. *Glory*: Atkins p. 491; Cic. *Rep.* 5. 9; Ramage p. 57. *Scipio’s dream*: Cic. *Rep.* 6. 16. *Rome’s task*: *Aen.* 6. 851-853. *Brutus*: *ibid.* 6. 818. *Rods and axes*: see pages 157-164.

⁸⁰ *Nero Drusus*: Tac. *Ann.* 1. 33. 3, 2. 82. 3; Suet. *Claud.* 1. 4. *Debate*: see for example Rich (1999).

true that some scholars have seen nothing sinister in this omission, it has also been suggested that the absence of the overtly military terminology was congruent with the first *princeps*' gradual attempt to play down any coercive aspect of his rule. This argument is strengthened by the uniquely unmilitary characterisation of Augustus' position at the climax of the *Res Gestae*. There *imperium* was superseded by overwhelming *auctoritas* and an apparent absence of overt power. Interpreted in this manner, the *Res Gestae* appears to support the importance to Augustus of honours and deference. The significance of coercive power is also highlighted by the carefully nuanced way in which it is given prominence with respect to Augustus' claimed exertions on behalf of the state.⁸¹

Honour and deference as important elements in the Roman system of status and power come into sharp focus even where they seem to be singularly lacking. At first glance, it is hard to imagine circumstances further from their operation than those in which an individual suffered *damnatio memoriae*. Although the phrase itself is not of ancient usage, if a person was judged by the senate to be an enemy of the state it could be decreed that action be taken to remove all traces of him from the public record. One individual to be so treated was Cn. Calpurnius Piso, condemned in 20 CE for, amongst other things, involvement in the suspicious death of Germanicus in Syria. Copies of the senate's decree, discovered in Spain in the late 1980s, informed readers of Piso's fate. However, the very existence of the inscribed decree clearly perpetuated rather than erased the memory of Piso, the circumstances of his crime and its judicial consequences. A similar if less sophisticated instance of this apparent paradox was recorded by Cicero. In response to the rapacious behaviour of Gaius Verres, the people of Tauromenium destroyed the statues of their former governor. However, they deliberately left in place the inscribed bases of the monuments in order to memorialise the disgrace. Clear visual evidence of *damnatio memoriae* can be seen today on the Arch of the Argentarii in Rome. When originally dedicated in 204 CE, the relief of Septimius Severus, his wife and two sons, Caracalla and Geta was complete. However, on assuming the throne jointly with his brother in 212 CE, Caracalla had Geta murdered, the image of the latter being removed from the monument (Plate 5).

⁸¹ Honours: RG 7, 9, and 11. *Imperium*: 1, 2 and 4. 1. Importance of *imperium proconsulare*: Syme (1939) p. 38. Innocent omission of *imperium proconsulare*: Yavetz (1984) p. 10. Suspicious omission of *imperium proconsulare*: Kienast p. 178.



However, as in the Tauromenium example, Geta's name is retained in the architrave inscription and the space left in the image must have proclaimed his presence at least as loudly as his absence. In all these examples the importance of signalling the active repudiation of certain individuals and/or their behaviour could only be sufficiently achieved by the demonstrable provision of a negative form of honour and deference. Merely consigning them to oblivion was not sufficient.⁸²

Coercion as the underlying method by which status and honour were established can also be detected in its apparent absence, perhaps as the original negative from which various positive images of Roman ideology were formed. Wallace-Hadrill argued persuasively from coin evidence that:

‘The justification for the emperor’s possession of power becomes his willingness to abstain from using it to the detriment of those concerned.’

Obverse images and legends indicating the emperor’s protection of property, personal security and social standing were prominent alongside others proclaiming his diverse virtues (see pages 192-195). Such messages clearly reflected the concerns and priorities of individuals who were interested in their ruler’s ideology. However, it is equally clear that they relied for their potency on the real prospect that an emperor had it in his power to unleash the opposites of those comfortable concepts. This fear was expressed in Arrian’s account of the sayings of Epictetus:

‘No one is afraid of Caesar himself, but he is afraid of death, exile, loss of property, prison, disenfranchisement...’⁸³

By any of the definitions considered in chapter three, Rome’s territorial control qualified it to be an empire. However, while it is clear that such domination is a necessary feature of an imperial state, a wide ranging review of comparative anthropological research into ancient empires concluded that:

‘The motives for imperial expansion are much more difficult to identify than is the end result’.

It has been suggested that any or all of a desire for material gain, security concerns and ideology might be involved. Focussing on Rome’s external relations, Mattern has

⁸² **Definition:** OCD3 p. 427. **Piso:** Potter (1999b) p. 27; Bodel p. 43-44. **Verres:** Cic. 2 *Verr.* 2. 160. **Arch of Argentarii:** Claridge p. 259-261.

⁸³ **Coins:** Wallace-Hadrill (1981) p. 317-319. **Fears:** Arr. *Epict. diss.* 4. 1. 60.

described the ethos of the Roman Imperial elite as one in which ‘...status and security depended on one’s perceived ability to inflict violence.’ Polybius made it clear that such an approach long predated the emperors and characterised at least all levels of the military. In the capture of New Carthage by Scipio Africanus, he described the troops’ systematic slaughter ‘of every form of life they encountered’, including dogs and other animals. Chillingly the historian noted that this behaviour was a controlled and deliberate part of standard practice ‘adopted to inspire terror’. Polybius was clear about the purpose of such terror. In the preface to his *Histories* he had announced the intention to explain how the Romans had come to bring ‘...under their rule almost the of the inhabited world.’ Later he clarified this as being a situation in which it was

‘...recognised that the whole world must accept the authority of Rome and obey her commands.’

In his account of Alexander, Plutarch ascribed to the Macedonian king a similar calculation to explain the particularly savage sack of Thebes in 335 BCE:

‘This was done, in the main, because Alexander expected that the Greeks would be terrified by so great a disaster and cower down in quiet.’

Ancient and modern sources have provided differing accounts of these events at Thebes and the reasons behind them. Some agreed with Plutarch, others suggested that the sack was more of an accident or shifted the blame from Alexander. In fact, evidence is lacking elsewhere in Alexander’s campaigns to support the idea that he employed a broad policy of political terror. It is just as likely that Plutarch had retrojected the Roman strategy familiar to him and described by Polybius. The latter’s analysis has been characterised in such stark terms as, ‘On the one side there are orders and on the other obedience.’ Such a relationship could be said to have been developed and refined within Rome’s political response to the Hellenistic world after 200 BCE. In so defining the conclusion of his researches, Polybius specifically distinguished this domination from one based on ‘nothing more than the outcomes of battles’. Elsewhere the basic Roman attitude has been summed up as a desire

‘...that her will should be obeyed by other nations – the fundamental concept behind the word *imperium*.’⁸⁴

⁸⁴ **Definition:** Sinopoli p. 160-161. **Motives:** *ibid.* p. 162. **Imperium:** Mattern p. xii. **New Carthage:** Polyb. 10. 15. **Domination:** *ibid.* 1. 1 and 3. 4. 2-3. **Alexander at Thebes:** Plut. *Alex.* 11. 5; Arr. *Anab.* 1. 10. 1f; Diod. Sic. 17. 14; Hamilton p. 30; Heckel p. 192; Hornblower (1991) p. 263. The explanation

When describing campaigns in Greece in 200 BCE, Livy emphasised the fear engendered in opponents by the unfamiliar savagery of Roman fighting methods. Marcellus was credited with controlling the savagery of the sack of Syracuse in 212 BCE. However, Archimedes was killed despite Marcellus' expressed distaste for the deed, and the Roman commander allowed his troops to slaughter the city's slave population, besides looting it of its artistic and religious treasures. Seriously or not, for this behaviour Plutarch credited Marcellus with being the first Roman to demonstrate to the Greeks a capacity for the 'civil virtues' of 'gentleness and humanity'! Again, during the sack of Athens in 86 BCE, only the exercise of Sulla's personal command brought to an end a slaughter of its inhabitants. However, this was not before gore had flowed into the Cerameicus such that it 'deluged the suburb', the number of the dead being only calculable from 'the space that was covered with blood.' The operations of Germanicus in Germany during 14 and 16 CE provided Tacitus with two opportunities to detail the violence of Roman arms and the terror it engendered. In the first, troops were ordered to ravage an area of the territory of the Marsi fifty miles wide. This task they set about with enthusiasm:

'Neither sex nor age aroused pity, things profane and sacred alike, including those people's most sacred temple...were levelled to the ground.'

In the second, the Cherusci were defeated and from

'...the fifth hour of the day until night the enemy were slaughtered, and their corpses and arms covered ten thousand paces.'

The mopping up included the amusement of archers as they shot down those who had climbed trees in their flight. In a later phase of the campaign Germanicus was said to have eschewed the taking of prisoners and proclaimed that '...only the annihilation of the race would bring an end to the war'. The significance of this portrayal of Germanicus' savagery is enhanced by his broad role for Tacitus as the ideal emperor that Rome never had.⁸⁵

of Roman 'contamination' could also, if true, be relevant to Diodorus' imputation of similar motives to Philip regarding the sack of Olynthus in 348 BCE (Diod. Sic. 16. 53. 3). **Orders/obedience/imperium:** Derow p. 4-5; Lintott (1993) p. 22; Lintott (1981) p. 54.

⁸⁵ **Greece:** Livy 31. 34. **Syracuse:** Plut. *Marc.* 19. 1-20. 1; Livy 25. 23. 9, 31. 9-10. **Athens:** Plut. *Sull.* 14. 4-5. **Marsi:** *Ann.* 1. 51. 1. **Cherusci:** *ibid* 2. 21. 1-2. Germanicus as Tacitus' ideal: Syme (1958b) p. 254, 492. **Roman aggression in general:** Harris p. 51.

Appian's second century CE expositions of Roman history and institutions, aimed at a Greek audience, were often inaccurate, although based on Polybius amongst other Greek and Latin authors. Thus, the apparent straightforwardness that he brought to a consideration of this issue may not be entirely trustworthy. Nevertheless, his account of Sulla's sacking of the town of Aeculanum in 89 BCE at least demonstrated what must have been a plausible portrayal of Roman policy to the author's audience. After giving the town a chance to surrender, the general set its wooden walls on fire. When the terrified inhabitants offered to capitulate,

'Sulla plundered it because it had not been delivered up voluntarily but under necessity. He spared other towns that gave themselves up, and in this way the entire population of the Hirpini was brought under subjection.'

Appian's Greek readers could well have related such an approach to the savage injunction of Agamemnon regarding the Trojans:

'Not one of them must escape stark destruction at our hands, even the boys still carried in their mothers' wombs - not even they must escape, but all be extinguished together, wiped from Ilios without sight or ceremony.'

Cassius Dio adapted this Homeric passage to describe Septimius Severus' stated intentions towards British rebels. A story in the SHA adds to the portrayal of such brutality as being deliberate policy rather than merely something uncontrollably savage in the nature of ancient warfare. Aurelian was reported to be so upset about the resistance of Tyana in 271 CE that he declared, "In this town I will not leave even a dog alive!" When the place had been captured, the Emperor was reminded of his determination by troops who were eager for the plunder that would accompany any slaughter. However, Aurelian had changed his mind and quipped, "...well, then, kill all the dogs." As the SHA author commented:

'Notable, indeed, were the prince's words, but more notable still was the deed of the soldiers...(who) took up the prince's jest, by which both booty was denied to them and the city preserved intact'.

Whatever the degree of historical truth in the story, it provides a late fourth century description of a presumably credible situation in which an emperor could contemplate the use of terror, but subordinate its imposition by victorious soldiers to the concerns of higher policy; in this case, Aurelian's wish to appear as the rescuer of the east from

the illegitimate power of Zenobia at Palmyra. However, during a later episode in which he crushed a rebellion in Palmyra itself, the same emperor used sterner methods and spelled out their meaning:

“We have not spared the women, we have slain the children...For it is our belief that the few (survivors) have been chastened by the punishment of the many”.⁸⁶

In the High Empire, Aristides talked glowingly of the impregnable defensive circuit of troops surrounding Rome's possessions. However, the anonymous early fourth century panegyrist of Constantine gave a sharper edge to this deployment. In addressing the Emperor, he too described the frontier defences, but characterised them as ‘...the terror aroused by your name’ and ‘...an impenetrable wall which the reputation for courage erects.’ Clearly carried away by his literary conceit, the author went so far as to describe more tangible elements of military presence, the Rhine forts, as ‘more an ornament for the frontier than for protection.’ Writing perhaps a little before Aristides, Appian also alluded to the idea of Rome and its possessions being defended as one entity. The emperors, he wrote,

‘...surround the empire with great armies and they garrison the whole stretch of land and sea like a single stronghold’.

Although Appian placed this image within a rather more sober review of Rome's place in the world, he nevertheless left no doubt about that nation's perception of superiority. He described the Empire as having physical limits, but stressed not only that Rome possessed ‘the best part of the earth and sea’ in terms of quality, but also that other ‘...poverty-stricken and profitless tribes of barbarians’ were deliberately left unconquered even though they offered themselves to the emperors as subjects. Beyond this, the importance of the deference/domination relationship was emphasised by Rome's declining to give up some provinces that were costly to maintain, ‘deeming it dishonourable’ to do so.⁸⁷

Rome's assumption of superiority and requirement for deference were clear in accounts of its early dealings with other powers. Livy provided one of the more

⁸⁶ **Aeculanum:** App. *B Civ.* 1. 51; OCD3 p. 130. **Tyana:** SHA *Aurel.* 23. 2-3; Watson p. 71-72.

Agamemnon: Il. 6. 57-59; Cass. Dio 76. 15. 1; Birley (1988) p. 188. **Palmyra:** SHA *Aurel.* 31. 5-6.

⁸⁷ **Defensive circuit:** Aristid. *Or.* 26. 84. **Impenetrable wall:** Pan. Lat. 6. 11. 1-5. **Single stronghold:** App. *Pref.* 7; Brunt (1990) p. 476.

colourful illustrations of this in his account of the diplomatic mission of Popilius Laenas in 168 BCE. He had been sent by the senate to Alexandria in order to meet the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV, and to dissuade him from occupying Ptolemaic Egypt. On being informed of Rome's demands concerning this matter, the King asked for time to consider his response. Popilius made no comment; instead he indicated the true nature of his diplomatic mission by using the rod he carried as symbol of his authority (see pages 157-164 on the *fascēs*) to draw a line in the sand around Antiochus. The Roman envoy then declared that he required an answer before the king stepped out of the circle. Antiochus 'hesitated for a moment, astounded by the violence of the command', but agreed to end his invasion of Egypt. Livy concluded the story with the report that:

'This commission achieved high renown among the nations, because Egypt had undoubtedly been taken away from Antiochus when he was in possession of that country and the ancestral throne had been restored to the house of Ptolemy.'

Thus, the episode provided no specific material benefit to the Empire; rather it enhanced Roman prestige by the humiliation of a powerful king and by confirming Rome's power to dispose of foreign thrones as it saw fit.⁸⁸

An avenue along which to explore Roman attitudes to territorial expansion may be provided by the history of the *pomerium*. Although its precise meaning and use is lost to us, this ancient perimeter of the city was clearly of considerable significance in Roman religion and in state symbolism. Of particular relevance here is the tradition that its circumference may have somehow represented the physical extent of Roman authority, since legitimate extensions to the *pomerium* could be made only by those who had been responsible for increasing the size of the Empire. In this respect Tacitus provided interesting and puzzling information. He suggested that since the time of the kings only Sulla, Augustus and Claudius had actually carried out the ceremony of extending the *pomerium*. Other sources indicated that Julius Caesar, Vespasian and Aurelian should also be included. Within even this select group it must be doubted whether either Augustus or Aurelian did in fact undertake the ritual, which brings into

⁸⁸ **Popilius:** Livy 45. 12. 3-8; Vell. Pat. 1. 10. 1-2.

sharper focus the issue of why more emperors did not utilise such an apparently potent source of prestige and renown.⁸⁹

One possible response may be to bring into question the extent to which purely territorial expansion was a highly prized achievement. Based on his claim that Numa was the first to build a temple to Terminus, and that god's eponymous association with boundaries, Plutarch discussed the problematic features of frontiers. He argued for their essentially pacific nature, rooted in their use to delineate agricultural areas. The fact that Romulus, the first and most aggressive of Roman kings, refused to recognise such legal and physical limits to his authority was used by the author to strengthen his case. It has also been noted that Strabo never once mentioned frontiers in his wide ranging descriptions of the Roman Empire. Thus, Vitruvius' flattering dedication to Augustus addressed the *princeps* directly, describing him as 'acquiring the right to command the whole world' and claiming that 'all foreign nations were in subjection awaiting your beck and call.' Velleius Paterculus introduced his survey of Rome's conquests as a

'...brief synopsis of the races and nations which were reduced to provinces and made tributary'

As Pliny elaborated on the triumph that he foresaw for Trajan, his focus was not on the lands to be conquered by the Emperor or other material gains; rather it was on captured kings:

'...the high sounding titles of chieftains whose persons are not unworthy of such names',

and on the *spolia opima* that would assuredly won '...if any king would dare to match himself against you'. If the personal nature of such glories was not clear enough from these elements, Pliny made the point quite obvious by suggesting that the enemy kings would be left

'...shuddering with terror...when confronted not only by your weapons but by a glance from your threatening eye.'

Sallust emphasised that kings and previously free peoples had been defeated and forced by Rome to pay tribute, while after the victory of Aemilius Paullus at Pydna in

⁸⁹ *Pomerium*: OCD3 p. 1213-1214; Tac. *Ann.* 12. 23-24. *Augustus*: Syme (1958b p. 378) lists the inclusion of Augustus as one of Tacitus' rare factual errors; the first princeps' omission of such a claim in his *Res Gestae* is persuasive. *Aurelian*: SHA *Aurel.* 21. 10; OCD3 p. 1213.

168 BCE, Velleius Paterculus made a feature of the fact that the general ‘...led in triumph the greatest and the most illustrious of kings (Perseus)’. Tacitus coldly summed up the Roman attitude as exemplified by the treatment of a king who was a loyal ally. He commented on the grant of lands to Cogidumnus:

‘It is an ancient...practice of the Roman people to use even kings as instruments of enslavement’.⁹⁰

Visual representations of the dominance/submission relationship are prominent in Roman imagery of power. The frequency with which barbarian captives were portrayed in images of abject submission or supplication gives a strong indication about the centrality of the idea in Roman ideology (**Plate 6**). It perhaps helps to gain a true impression of that ideology to observe that modern susceptibilities do not favour the depiction of the enemy on war memorials at all. On one of the Boscoreale cups a seated Augustus is portrayed with the hand of clemency ostentatiously outstretched to supplicating barbarians. Subtler elements, such as the relative position of hands, could be used to illustrate differences in power and status (**Plate 7 i**).⁹¹

The psychological dimension of Roman dominance was also emphasised by our sources’ concentration on the conquest of peoples and nations rather than territory. In a wide ranging review of the extent of the Roman Empire Appian chose to describe the distant boundaries of the territory, such as Ocean and the Pillars of Hercules. Within these few geographical markers he then listed the peoples subject to Roman rule. In a more specific context Josephus described Gaius’ problems with the Jews in similar terms, since they were the one exception when

‘...all the subject peoples of the Roman Empire had dedicated altars and temples to Gaius’.

In honour of Trajan’s successes in the east, the senate voted that his subsequent triumph could celebrate the subjection of as many nations/peoples as he wished. The point could not be made any sharper than by the epitomator of Cassius Dio in describing Marcus Aurelius’ attitude towards the Quadi in 179 CE. Harassed by

⁹⁰ **Numa and Romulus:** Plut. *Num.* 16; Whittaker (1994) p. 10. **Strabo:** *ibid.* p. 26. **Augustus:** Vitr. 1 Pref. 1. **Velleius Paterculus:** Vell. Pat. 2. 38. 1. **Trajan:** Plin. *Pan.* 17. 1-3. **Kings forced to submit:** Sall. *Iug.* 14. 1, 31. 9. **Aemilius Paullus:** Vell. Pat. 1. 9. 5. **Cogidumnus:** Tac. *Agr.* 14.

⁹¹ **Submission:** Brilliant p. 189-195. **Frequency:** Bradley p. 298-299. **Modern war memorials:** Rose p. 21. **Boscoreale:** Pollitt p. 274; Brilliant p. 74. **Lucius Verus:** *ibid.* p. 152.



(i) Arch of
Septimius Severus



(ii) Adamklissi Monument



(iii) Tetrarchs' Decenalia



(iv) Hadrian

Roman soldiers stationed in forts throughout their territory, the tribe attempted to migrate. In blocking their flight Marcus prolonged a situation in which the Quadi's normal agricultural activities were impossible. As the author commented:

‘This showed that he desired, not to acquire their territory, but to punish the men themselves.’

It has been concluded that this aspect of Roman ideology can be traced without significant change from Augustus to Constantine. An inscription on one of the latter's forts at Cologne announced ‘the subjection and control of the Franks’.⁹²

A focus on self-image and psychology as defining aspects of *imperium* should not of course entirely eclipse territorial aggrandisement as a factor explaining Roman attitudes towards other peoples. For example, it is clearly possible to assemble numerous coin legends and other inscriptions that indicated continued territorial expansion as at least a rhetorical aspiration. Pompey's third triumph, held in 61 BCE following his victory over Mithridates, provided interesting evidence as detailed by Plutarch. The full description began with a list of conquered nations and then progressed through captured strongholds, cities, and pirate ships, cities founded, revenue generated and booty won. The royal captives and battle trophies were recorded next. As a rhetorical conclusion to the account, Plutarch noted that Pompey had held a triumph to celebrate victories in each of the world's three continents, Africa, Europe and now Asia. However, more than the geographical aspect itself, the biographer stressed the fact that this was an achievement that no other Roman had attained. Thus, the focus returned to individual psychology. The elements of territory and psychological domination were both manifested in prayers used on that most solemn occasion, the *ludi saeculares*. Attested epigraphically for their celebration by Augustus in 17 BCE, the prayers linked requests that the gods might ‘...increase the empire and majesty of the Roman people’ and ensure ‘that the Latin may always obey’. That the focus was on the obedience of the Latins, effectively ruled by Rome since the second half of the fourth century BCE, has been used to argue for the possibility that the prayers had been used in earlier *ludi saeculares*. Again both parts of the phrase *orbem terrarum*, used in the subtitle of Augustus' *Res Gestae* to denote Rome's control of

⁹² **Peoples and nations:** Vitr. *De arch.* pref 1; Isaac (1992) p. 395. **Appian:** *Pref* 1-5. **Josephus:** AJ 18. 258. **Trajan:** Cass. Dio 68. 29. 2. **Marcus Aurelius:** Cass. Dio 71. 20. 1-2. **Constantine:** Whittaker (2004) p. 46.

‘the whole world’, were grounded in the physical reality of the Empire. Plausible analyses using archaeological data have sought to demonstrate that the practicality of supply routes from the Mediterranean littoral were relevant to the process of territorial expansion. The use of the globe on coin types indicating the power of particular emperors reinforced this point (**Plate 7 ii and iii**). It might be possible to argue that the globe, as a symbol, could have been used to represent the otherwise difficult to portray abstract concept of psychological domination. However, in the context of a general survey of ancient imperialism, Garnsey and Whittaker provided the caution that conquerors seldom explain their behaviour by simple reference to a desire to conquer and dominate. Far more likely are the use of ‘ritual justifications and pretexts’, often involving retaliation for real or manufactured injuries, a need to establish security or even a desire to bring the gifts of civilization to those perceived as lacking them.⁹³

These complexities have provided the basis for analyses that viewed the Roman Empire as the accidental result of defensive and reactive actions, rather than of a deliberate imperialism. Such ideas can be traced back to Mommsen in the nineteenth century and have been much debated. While it is fair to caution against a view that seeks to establish either aggression or defence as the explanation for all Rome’s wars, the underlying dominance/subservience thesis would certainly suggest that the former was the norm. In fact, in the wider terms of that thesis, as it applies to the nature of Roman politics, competition within the elite could lead to arguments against war, or for its delay, in order to frustrate a particular individual’s attempt to gain glory from military conflict. This competition is discussed in the next section. Looking beyond Roman imperialism, to the deeper springs of political action, even such a renowned proponent of the ‘accidental Empire’ thesis as Badian was in little doubt about the underlying ethos:

‘Nothing could be further from the truth than to suppose that the Roman oligarchy felt a moral repugnance towards aggression and domination or believed in the co-existence of equal and fully sovereign states’.⁹⁴

⁹³ **Inscriptions:** Mann, J.C. (1979) p. 177. **Triumph:** Plut. *Pomp.* 35. **Ludi Saeculares and the Latins:** Harris p. 120-122, 265-266; OCD3 p. 821. **Orbem terrarum:** Lintott (1981) p. 53. **Supply routes:** see Fulford. **Ritual justifications :** Garnsey and Whittaker p. 4.

⁹⁴ **Debate:** North (1981); Rich (1993) p. 38-44. **Caution:** *ibid.* p. 65. **Arguments against war:** *ibid.* p. 53. **Ethos of aggression:** Badian (1968) p. 4.



(i) Lucius Verus and captives



(ii) Domitian BMC 62



(iii) Hadrian BMC 1106

Whatever the precise role of territorial expansion, it is clear that the acquisition of moveable wealth played an important role in Roman conquest. Descriptions of Republican and Imperial triumphs emphasising booty are reinforced by prominent depictions such as that on the Arch of Titus (**Plate 8**). However, the principles that underlay Rome's imperialist ideology can be illustrated from Plutarch's biography of Cato the Censor. That sternest and most austere of moralists was said to have been inspired by the example of the early third century consul, Manius Curius. Offered gold as a bribe by the Samnites, (who had not unreasonably been encouraged to do so when they came upon him cooking a meal of turnips!), Curius had responded by declaring that

‘...he thought that a more honourable thing than the possession of gold was the conquest of its possessors.’

The basic point was reinforced from the entirely different and anything but austere standpoint of Scipio Africanus. Attacked by Cato, then a young man, for wasting public money, the great general retorted that

‘...he had no time for a parsimonious quaestor when the winds were bearing him under full sail to the war; he owed the city an account of his achievements, not of its moneys.’

Besides the declared relegation of financial matters to a minor role, the two stories shared another important feature, the elevation of conquest and military dominance to be the primary concern.⁹⁵

The establishment of dominance/subservience as the only appropriate relationship between Rome and other peoples can be seen from many examples. Its status as an end in itself will be seen to reflect the power relationship that existed between Roman rulers and all their subjects. The diplomatic contacts during 58 BCE between Julius Caesar and the Suebic king, Ariovistus, provided a good example of the pursuit of domination/subservience as a goal. In following an established pattern of acting in defence of an ally of Rome, in this case the Aedui, Caesar recorded his view that their enslavement by Ariovistus was ‘a disgrace to himself and his country’. In addition to the physical danger posed to Roman territory by the powerful monarch, Caesar listed as a reason for action that, ‘Ariovistus personally had behaved with quite intolerable

⁹⁵ Booty : Plut. Aem. 22. 5 ; Tac. Ann. 2. 41. 2. Cato and Scipio: Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 2.2 and 3. 6.



Arch of Titus: Judean triumph

arrogance and pride'. As far as Rome was concerned, any foreign individual or people that was not displaying satisfactorily meek responses to the Empire's greatness must have been indulging in arrogance (*arrogantia/superbia*). The threat or use of force was the only suitable response, but whatever was done, the important goal was a restoration of respect and prestige. In Caesar's account of a later episode, the revolts of 54-53 BCE, intimidation, persuasion, personal prestige and tribal reputation were given prominence as motives and methods of operation. A refusal by the leaders of the Senones to obey Caesar's personal command to appear before him was crucial both in determining his own reaction and in emboldening the Gauls. Even the flight of a potential opponent could be interpreted as an affront that required the most violent response. Thus, when Ambiorix of the Eburones

'...fled in terror and so could not be forced into submission, Caesar thought that the next best way of obtaining the satisfaction that his honour demanded was to strip the country of inhabitants, cattle and buildings'.

Perhaps it can be argued that it was resentment at Caesar's personal appropriation of this attitude and his application of it to Roman politics that led to his death.⁹⁶

Personal honour and conflict: the individual

Our ancient sources were far readier than modern historians to represent history as being impelled by the ambitions, fears and calculations of individuals or of groups. Examples range from the collective emotions of whole communities to the cravings of particular characters. In the former category mutual fear was identified as the adhesive holding together the competing elements of the tripartite Roman constitution; it is interesting that works as far apart in date and type as Polybius and the SHA draw attention to this factor. Velleius Paterculus laid an emphasis on fear as a driving force of political developments. He suggested that alarm at the prospect of further civil war in 82 BCE overcame the people's dread of a dictator's powers; thus, it sanctioned the revival of an office last used in other fearful times, namely those of Hannibal's invasion of Italy. As a Greek model, another sort of fear, that of disgrace, was seen to function for the Spartans as 'the chief support of their civil polity'. A third variety, fear of domination from outside the community, was identified as the Spartans' overriding

⁹⁶ **Julius Caesar:** Mattern p. 182; *B.Gall.* 1. 33. **Superbia and the Roman response:** Mattern p. 175. **Senones:** *B. Gall.* 5. 54; Doyle p. 30. **Ambiorix:** *ibid.* 8. 24.

reaction to the growth of Athenian power in the mid fifth century BCE. A good example of the emotions of a single person being seen as the driver of events was Antony's 'mad desire to be first and greatest', an all-consuming personal ambition

'...which led him to war against all mankind, as it had led Alexander before him, and Cyrus of old...an insatiable love of power'.

In the prefatory comments to his sweeping survey of Roman civil conflicts in the period between the Gracchi and Augustus, Appian could hardly have been clearer in his focus upon individual ambition and the ruthless pursuit of glory as motivators for the politics of the whole era. He commended his history, stating that it

'...is well worth the study of those who wish to know the measureless ambition of men, their dreadful lust for power, their unwearying perseverance, and the countless forms of evil.'⁹⁷

The strength and ubiquity of these emotions and desires were emphasised by Plutarch. Marius, rival to Sulla over the leadership of the campaign against Mithridates, was described as being '...possessed by ambition and a mad desire for fame, those never ageing passions'. It does not seem unreasonable to advocate the integration of emotion, reason and action as features of the Roman world-view. Polybius certainly seemed to be heading towards such an analysis in the opening chapters of Book 3, in which he expanded on his initial preface regarding the scope of his work. He stated as a fact that wars were not undertaken without a purpose. To explain this he drew a parallel with other activities, such as the arts and crafts or sailing on the sea, which he claimed were only taken on '...for the sake of the pleasure, honour or advantage' to be gained. Unfortunately, despite his advertised intention to examine these factors as they applied to Roman expansion, Polybius never really got beyond the obvious fact of that expansion; he largely failed to illuminate its stimulus. Nevertheless, it is clear that reasons of personal drive and ambition could have fallen within the boundaries of the author's proposed motivations. Plutarch certainly placed these elements in the foreground of his characters' reasons for action. He linked noble deeds on behalf of the state with a desire for personal glory. As an exception that proved the rule, Cato the

⁹⁷ **Fear:** Polyb. 6. 18; SHA *Tac.* 2. 2; Vell. Pat. 2. 28. 2; Hahm p. 474; Plut. *Cleom.* 8; Thuc. 1. 23, 88. **Ambition:** Plut. *Ant.* 6. 3; App. *B Civ.* 1. 6.

Younger was described as being unusual in wishing to emulate his great grandfather's service to Rome without the accompanying desire for personal recognition.⁹⁸

Rivalry between individuals for personal honour could be viewed as a mechanism driving towards the goal of virtue. Plutarch ascribed to natural philosophers the notion that

‘...if strife and discord should be banished from the universe, the heavenly bodies would stand still, and all generation and motion would cease in consequence of the general harmony.’

In order to counteract this stagnation, so it was claimed, Agesilaus, the Spartan law-giver had

‘...introduced the spirit of ambition and contention into his civil polity as an incentive to virtue, desiring that good citizens should always be somewhat at variance and in conflict with one another’.

Relevant here is an attempt by Velleius Paterculus to analyse a phenomenon he claimed to have identified; namely, that the most eminent men in a number of fields of endeavour, such as philosophy, literature and oratory, tended to appear during the same narrow period of time. Neither the truth of this perception nor the examples that he cited need detain us. Of interest is his speculation about the psychological mechanism that could be in operation. Fuelled by a combination of envy and admiration, a man would attempt to emulate a genius. However, finding the task to be impossible, he would divert his efforts into another area, being unable to tolerate anything less than pre-eminence. Lack of debate, struggle and effort could indicate weakness and complacency rather than true concord. On the other hand, Plutarch also warned that ‘...excessive rivalries are injurious to states, and productive of great perils’. Ostensibly the problems alluded to were those of first century BCE Rome, as evidenced by Plutarch's consistently apocalyptic references to them. However, as always, an analysis of contemporary political realities must also be assumed.⁹⁹

A perspective that focuses on personal motivation and emotion can lead to what appears to be rather over-heated language. Barton, for example, described emotions as

⁹⁸ ‘**Mad Desire**’: Plut. *Sull.* 7. 1. **Possible motives**: Polyb. 3. 4; Harris p. 1; Raaflaub (1996) p. 278-279. **Desire for glory as the norm**: Plut. *Cat. Min.* 8. 1-2.

⁹⁹ **Rivalry as a positive force**: Plut. *Ages.* 5. 3-4; Vell. Pat. 1. 16. 2-17. 7. **Dangers of excessive rivalry**: see, for example, Plutarch's broadside at *Sull.* 12. 6-9.

‘...moving forces, motives, the sources of energy and action’. Nevertheless, perhaps the temperature of the prose is appropriate to the object of warming up the debate and giving enhanced attention to the passions of individuals as motives for political actions. This must certainly have been the view of Bertrand de Jouvenel as he argued for the role of egoism in the conceptualisation of power. In commenting on attempts to remove it from academic debate on the matter, he declared:

‘The chimera of elimination (of egoism) has been increasingly pursued by minds whose limited range is only equalled by their good intentions’.

While such language may not be altogether necessary, attention to the role of psychological domination as an underlying motivator should refocus analysis of the ancient material.¹⁰⁰

The rivalry between Julius Caesar and Pompey provides a fruitful area to explore this idea. Both Lucan and Plutarch explained the reasons for the conflict between Caesar and Pompey in the clearest of personal terms. Plutarch indicated that the clash had long been inevitable and that after the third contender, Crassus, had been killed by the Parthians in 53 BCE

‘...it remained for him who would be greatest to put down him who was, and for him who was the greatest, if he would not be put down, to take off in time the man he feared.’

In the more succinct language of a poet, Lucan encapsulated the same idea:

‘Caesar cannot now bear anyone ahead
nor Pompey any equal’.

With a focus upon Pompey, Velleius Paterculus commented that the general

‘...from the time when he first took part in public life, could not brook an equal at all. In undertakings in which he should have been merely the first he wished to be the only one. No one was ever more indifferent to other things or possessed a greater craving for glory...’

Caesar at the Rubicon has been characterised as no less dominated by personal motivation. Appian had him express this in the most extreme manner:

“...to leave this stream uncrossed will breed manifest distress for me; to cross it, for all mankind.” Thereupon, he crossed in a rush.’

¹⁰⁰ **Language:** Barton p. 2 and passim; de Jouvenel p. 109-110.

The sources certainly provide support for the idea that Caesar took this step reluctantly, forced into it by the perceived certainty of prosecution in the courts if he laid down his military command. However, this argument does not reflect the reality of his ambition and behaviour both before and after he became dominant. Plutarch indicated the emotional temperature of the political struggle, describing Caesar as crossing the stream ‘...with a sort of passion, as if abandoning calculation’.¹⁰¹

Elsewhere in his *Lives* Plutarch gave prominence to the theme of personal rivalry as a driver of political action. In fact his chosen format of paired subjects itself promoted the idea of competition; each individual given a separate treatment, followed by a *synkrisis* (comparison) of the two. Examples of rivalries abound. Themistocles and Aristides were depicted as in conflict from the beginning about the ‘desire to be first’. Even when they put their differences aside when facing the Persian invasion of 480 BCE their reconciliation was such as to recognise and redirect their competition. Themistocles is made to say;

“I should not have wished, O Aristides, to find thee superior to me here; but I shall try to emulate thy fair beginning, and to surpass thee in my actions”.

Marcus Manlius was said to have attempted to pervert the political process expressly because legitimate politics were dominated by his rival, Camillus. Pericles adjusted both his political outlook and style of life in order to facilitate his rivalry with Cimon. Pompey’s ‘innate ambition and love of power’ was fuelled by his ‘enmity towards Lucullus’, thus demonstrating a view of political aspiration and personal rivalry as two sides of the same coin. That

‘...bitter and incurable hatred between Marius and Sulla, which nearly brought Rome to ruin...’

had its origins in jealousy over personal glory. Coriolanus’ pride and the challenge of perceived ingratitude to his sense of personal worth could impel him to turn on his own City.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ **Caesar and Pompey:** Plut. *Caes.* 23. 1; *Luc.* 1. 125-126; Vell. Pat. 2. 33. 3. **Rubicon:** App. *B Civ.* 2. 35; Suet. *Iul.* 30; Stanton p. 68-69; Plut. *Caes.* 32.

¹⁰² **Themistocles and Aristides:** *Them.* 3. 1; *Arist.* 8. 2-5. **Marcus Manlius:** *Cam.* 36. 2-7. **Pericles:** *Per.* 7. 3-4. **Pompey and Lucullus:** *Pomp.* 30. 6. **Marius and Sulla:** *Mar.* 10. **Coriolanus:** Livy 2. 35; Plut *Cor.* 23.

In some contexts the idea that a prominent man could have a rival was introduced without explanation, presumably because it was deemed to need none. If competition with another could not readily be identified, individuals could be portrayed as being motivated to surpass their own earlier achievements. Objects of rivalry could be quite vague, but nevertheless pursued with strong emotion. Sulla's '...inexorable passion for the capture of Athens' was explained by his '...fighting with a sort of ardour against the shadow of the city's former glory.' The robustness of psychological domination as a motivator and focus of self-identity can be demonstrated from a different angle in the case of Fabius Maximus. During his dictatorship in 217 BCE, the Romans appointed the master of horse, Minucius Rufus, to be a second dictator. This amounted to the clearest of political rebuffs as

'...the people supposed that (Fabius) would feel shorn of strength and altogether humble'.

However, Fabius simply refused to perceive the action as a personal rejection, preferring to view it solely as a mistake on the part of the citizens. Thus his sense of psychological supremacy was undamaged. The drive to surpass both others' and his own achievements was thus portrayed as an expected element in the persona of any great man. For Plutarch this rule was demonstrable in its rare exceptions. He made much of co-operation between the Thebans, Pelopidas and Epaminondas, in sharing the leadership of their state without the usual '...mutual dissensions, envyings and jealousies'. Brutus was described as being exceptional in the political purity of his motives for assassinating Caesar; his fellow conspirators were involved because 'they hated and envied' the dictator. This last example is interesting in that Plutarch felt the need to add a discussion of the ethical balance between personal and public motives. In the *Synkrisis* of Brutus and Dion, the author explicitly asked whether Caesar's evident goodwill towards Brutus and the lack of a personal cause made the assassin's act more or less praiseworthy. Although Plutarch came down in favour of the public rather than the private grievance, the fact that he asked the question at all showed the power of personal rivalry as an accepted motive.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ **No explanation:** *Cat. Mai.* 11. **Motivation to surpass own achievements:** *Cim.* 13. 3; *Caes.* 58. 2. **Sulla:** *Sull.* 13. 1. **Fabius Maximus:** *Fab. Max.* 10. 1-2. **Drive to excel:** *Cor.* 4. 1. **Exceptions:** *Pel.* 4. 2-3; *Brut.* 29.5; *Synk.* 3. 3-6.

Plutarch's early second century CE account of the Hellenistic ruler Demetrius strongly accented the desire for personal domination over rivals, and its operation in war and dynastic struggles. Demetrius was defeated by the more experienced Ptolemy, who promptly returned to the young man his captured friends and personal possessions. The motivation provided to Demetrius by this reverse was said to be the feeling of indebtedness it engendered, rather than any desire for revenge or concern about the strategic situation. His father, Antigonus, specifically '...not wishing to humble or curtail the spirit of his son' allowed Demetrius to fight again. Ptolemy's general, Cilles, portrayed as '...looking down upon him because of his previous defeat,' was nevertheless surprised and himself defeated by the young man. Demetrius was described as being:

'...delighted, not so much with the wealth and glory which his victory brought, as with the power it gave him to recompense the kindness and return the favour of Ptolemy.'

Again, the wealth gained by Antigonus and Demetrius in wars against barbarians was used to win glory and honour from the Greeks, the goodwill of the Athenians being seen as more valuable than physical possession of the city. To drive home the point, Plutarch applied this analysis to the rivalry between Julius Caesar and Pompey after the death of Crassus in Parthia in 53 BCE. In a rhetorical flourish, the author, quoting Homer, recounted that even the chief gods, Zeus, Poseidon and Pluto, had divided authority over the universe into three domains; the rival generals, however, '...did not think the Roman dominion enough for themselves, who were but two'. Elsewhere Plutarch had Caesar suggest that the ambition to exceed the achievements of others was the driving force, rather than any depersonalised political aims. When passing through a particularly impoverished looking village in the Alps the Roman leader remarked, 'I would rather be first here than second at Rome'. Clearly, this example demonstrates that all such statements should be handled with care. Whether the comment was authentically Caesar's or was invented by Plutarch, its purpose was to add rhetorical weight to any estimate of the future dictator's ambition, rather than to be taken literally. At a more specific level the fruits of victory were also subsidiary to more directly psychological matters in Plutarch's account of the behaviour of Nicias after defeating the Corinthians in 425 BCE. Contrary to the report of Thucydides that the Athenian general set up a trophy after his victory, Plutarch stated that he did not do so. The reason given was that he had had to petition the beaten Corinthians in order to

obtain the bodies of two Athenians left behind on the field after the normal truce for the collection of the dead. The biographer spelled out the issue as being that

‘...by usage and unwritten law...petitioners do not possess the field, since they cannot take what they want’.

It is perhaps significant that Thucydides, from a purely Greek and closely contemporary perspective, made nothing of this matter, while it did seem important to Plutarch from his perspective as a witness to Roman power at its height. To illustrate his understanding of Rome, the biographer recorded the care and sensitivity with which he studied Latin literature. However, he claimed that this had only been possible after he left the City and Italy, because while there he had been occupied with official duties. Such a claim, alongside his direct writings on political matters, reinforces confidence in him as an observer of Roman politics. It also adds weight to interpretations of his *Lives* as being likely to reflect those observations.¹⁰⁴

Cassius Dio was another Greek commentator on Rome who was informed by an intimate acquaintance with its elite politics. He, too, demonstrated the extent to which personal rivalry was embedded in that system. One way in which he did this was to illustrate its relevance even to the excesses of the apparently most self-absorbed emperors. Thus Gaius was described as boasting that his pointless bridge of boats in the Bay of Naples exceeded the length of those built by Darius and Xerxes, and that the calm weather in which it was constructed indicated his mastery over Neptune himself. Suetonius suggested a range of other possible motives and his choice of the term ‘spectacle’ to describe the enterprise perhaps gives it a saner colouring. Nevertheless, arguments that details of the affair suggest Gaius’ desire to emulate Alexander seem convincing and bring us back to the central idea of rivalry. Nero, said to have deliberately set out to surpass Gaius in immorality, was provided with an explicit justification in the language of personal rivalry:

‘...for he held it to be one of the obligations of the imperial power not to fall behind anybody else even in the basest deeds’.

¹⁰⁴ **Demetrius and Antigonus:** Plut. *Demetr.* 5. 2-6, 3 and 8. 1-2; Kralli p. 117-118. **Pompey and Caesar:** *Pomp.* 53. 6-7. **Caesar in the Alps:** *Caes.* 11. 2. **Nicias:** *Nic.* 6. 5-6; Thuc. 4. 44. **Plutarch and Rome:** *Dem.* 2. 2-3.

Perhaps the unreasonable extreme of a desire to excel beyond all others was reached in the description of Commodus' desire to be termed '*Exsuperatorius*'. As explained, with appropriate editorial comment, the purpose of this title was

‘...to indicate that in every respect he surpassed absolutely all mankind superlatively; so superlatively mad had the abandoned wretch become.’

In relation to Galba, Cassius Dio made the same general point about an emperor's requirement to surpass all others, this time in a positive context. The new ruler was praised for suppressing Nero's bodyguards, refusing Praetorian demands for more money and for resisting clamour to execute particular henchmen of Nero. The terms of this praise centred on both personal characteristics and the need to dominate. By his actions Galba was said to have shown commendable vigour and his belief that ‘...an emperor should submit to compulsion in nothing’. In the course of writing about Roman affairs, yet another Greek made the ubiquitous nature of rivalry perfectly explicit. At the first sign of threat to the joint rule of Balbinus and Pupienus Maximus, Herodian commented:

‘...so great is the desire for sole rule and so contrary to the usual practice is it for the sovereignty to be shared that each undertook to secure the imperial power for himself alone.’

It may also be possible that in some instances our ancient sources failed to indicate the relevance of personal rivalry as a motivator of imperial actions. For example, both Cassius Dio and Herodian emphasised Septimius Severus' general desire for glory. However, neither author related that emperor's forlorn efforts to capture the fortress city of Hatra to the earlier failed attempts of a model conquering emperor, Trajan. The plausibility of this suggestion must certainly be reinforced by the date in 198 on which Septimius chose to take the title '*Parthicus Maximus*' (28th January). This was the precise centenary of the accession of the *optimus princeps*.¹⁰⁵

In relation to the foregoing account of ancient rulers' determination to monopolise power, and of Roman emperors' inability to countenance rivals, some consideration is called for of the circumstances in which the Imperial authority was apparently shared between two or more individuals. Perhaps rooted in the Roman tradition of double and

¹⁰⁵ **Gaius:** Cas. Dio 59. 17. 11; Suet. *Calig.* 19; Malloch (2000b) p. 215. **Nero:** Cass. Dio 61. 5. 1. **Commodus:** ibid. 72. 15. 4. **Galba:** ibid. 64. 3. 2-3. **Balbinus/Pupienus:** Herodian 8. 8. 4. **Severus and glory:** Cass Dio 75. 2. 3-4; Herodian 3. 9. 1. **Hatra and Trajan:** Birley (1988) p. 130-133.

multiple magistracies, the supremacy of the emperors had shown itself capable of manifestation in more than one person at a time since the latter part of the dominance of Augustus himself. On his adoption in 4 CE, the exceptional powers granted to Tiberius, a wide *imperium* and *tribunicia potestas* for ten years, effectively made him 'co-regent as well as heir' to the sixty-six year old *princeps*. There can be little doubt that Titus, twenty-nine years old in 69 CE and already an experienced military commander, played a substantial political role in the accession of his father. In 71 he was granted similar powers to those of Tiberius. With a setting at the siege of Jerusalem in the previous year, Josephus gave the younger man a speech in which he referred to Vespasian and himself as emperors. Pliny recorded 'the sharing of authority' between Nerva and Trajan. The complex dynastic arrangements dictated by Hadrian meant that Marcus Aurelius was effectively marked for the succession from the beginning of the reign of Antoninus Pius. In 147 CE he received from his adoptive father the Imperial titles and powers noted above. From that point, and probably even more so on the death in 156/157 of the long-serving Praetorian prefect, Gavius Maximus, Marcus was *de facto* co-emperor. Lucius Verus went one step further and held the formal position of joint emperor with Marcus Aurelius. As a final example, and demonstration of the apparent practical sharing of power, first Maximian in 286 and then Galerius and Constantius in 293 joined Diocletian to form a Tetrarchy of emperors.¹⁰⁶

However, in all of these cases there can have been no contemporary doubt and there is no historical uncertainty that one individual was dominant. Regardless of titles and honours, Augustus and Marcus Aurelius clearly possessed greater *auctoritas*, that diffuse but decisive quality of authority and influence, than their colleagues. The first *princeps* could hardly have stressed more this feature of his rule, making it part of the climax of his *Res Gestae*. In all the examples cited, there was a 'senior' partner who had initiated the elevation of a colleague or colleagues. It is true that in the case of Nerva the adoption and appointment to full powers of Trajan came about after a year of the former's militarily unsteady and brief reign. Nevertheless, for the final year before his death, Nerva retained the formal trappings of power and was treated with the

¹⁰⁶ **Double magistracies:** Williams, S. p. 48-49. **Tiberius:** Levick (1999a) p. 49. **Titus:** Levick (1999b) p. 185; Joseph. BJ 6. 341. **Trajan:** Plin *Pan.* 6. 4-5. **Marcus:** SHA *Marc.* 6. 6; Birley (1987) p. 103, 112. **Lucius Verus:** SHA *Verus.* 3. 8-4. 1. **Tetrarchy:** Williams, S. p. 64; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 39.

utmost posthumous respect. In relation to honours and position, it must also be noted from coin and epigraphic evidence that the dominant individual held the position of *pontifex maximus*, a position almost never granted to or usurped by a colleague/successor until the death of the principal emperor. While a possible exception, again suggested by coin evidence, was Diocletian's colleague, Maximian, this general rule may have obtained some of its strength from Augustus' refusal to take on the role before the death of the incumbent in 13 BCE. In addition to the blood or adoptive relationships of father and son that identified the seniority of Augustus, Vespasian and Nerva, religious and other imagery could unmistakably indicate the dominant individual. Thus, while the ideology of the Tetrarchy associated Diocletian with Jupiter, the king of the gods, Maximian was coupled with Hercules, a mere demigod.¹⁰⁷

Reference to earlier, non-Roman examples may provide clues to the central roles of war itself and of dominance/subservience in rulers' attitudes to their status in the eyes of others. At its most basic, Homer could refer to death at the hands of another as being brought 'to a shameful fate'. In the heat of argument, Achilles reminded Agamemnon that the Greeks had joined the expedition to Troy in order to win back the honour (*time*) lost by Menelaus when his wife had been abducted by Paris. In a Roman context, Suetonius described Caesar's dying wish to cover the lower half of his body in order to fall in a decent manner. To do so, the author chose to use the adverb '*honestius*', with its meanings of social and moral dignity beyond mere bodily propriety. Similar meanings could be conveyed by the antithesis of the Caesar example. In sculpture, the complete nakedness of a fallen barbarian warrior was clearly no accident of artistic expression. It reinforced the inferiority and moral subservience of the defeated enemies of Rome (Plate 9).¹⁰⁸

It is not possible to leave the topic of rivalry between individuals without adding a particular caution about the nature of our literary sources. It is an inescapable feature of all historiography that the character and content of its material is profoundly shaped

¹⁰⁷ *Auctoritas*: RG 34. 3. *Senior partner*: Bennett p. 34-41; Cass. Dio 68. 3. 3-4. 1; Plin. *Pan.* 11. *SHA Verus* 4. 1; Williams, S. p. 68. *Pontifex maximus*: Beard, North and Price p. 188, 252; Aug. RG 10. 2; Bennett p. 48; Birley (1987) p. 117. *Religion*: Pan. Lat. 10.13. 3; Williams, S. p. 58.

¹⁰⁸ *Shameful fate*: *Il.* 4. 396. *Menelaus' honour*: *Il.* 1. 159-160. *Julius Caesar*: Suet. *Caes.* 82. *Honestius*: Lewis and Short p. 861; Suetonius used the phrase *virginis honestae vaticinatione* ('the predictions of a noble virgin') in *Galb.* 9.

Naked fallen Gauls



by the social, political and literary context in which it is written. Focussing on the last of these elements, it is also reasonable to add that the historiography of Greece and Rome was probably at least as affected by the influences of genre as that of any other period. Characteristics such as deliberate evocation, emulation and competition were integral to its form in all eras. In the present context, again it is the last of those characteristics that is most relevant. Its reach can be demonstrated from our earliest surviving fragments of Greek historiography. Thus, it was the unconvincing and inconsistent nature of earlier accounts that exercised Hecataeus:

‘...I write what follows as it seems to me to be true; for the stories of the Greeks are varied and, as is manifest to me, ludicrous’.

Thucydides accused Hellanicus of inappropriate abbreviation and inaccuracy, while Herodotus backed his own view of the Trojan War as being more accurate and credible than Homer’s. Dionysius criticised the accuracy of both his Greek and Roman predecessors, ‘...including some of the highest reputation’, and claimed to provide new information. Polybius devoted more space and energy than most to attacks on other historians. Even though his preface opened with an apparent fanfare for his historiographical predecessors, Polybius soon had them in his sights for failing to provide the necessary breadth of focus. Thereafter, they are seldom safe from his censure. He devoted most of the surviving half of Book XII to particular criticisms of Timaeus, employing his blunderbuss on subject matter, methodology, expression and bias. In passing, it is worth noting that, in a review of Greek historians, Cicero had Antonius praise Timaeus for being well informed, thoughtful and stylish. He did not even mention Polybius! If nothing else, this must be a reminder of the particular and limited perspective allowed to us by the largely random survival of such a small proportion of ancient historiography.¹⁰⁹

Among Latin writers, individualized polemic was less widespread. In his artfully self-effacing preface, Livy seemed keener to establish the credentials of his history in relation to the wide spectrum of mythological, poetic and historical genres, than to limit comparison to individual historians. He even included a unique call upon the gods to ratify his efforts. In the preface to his non-historical work, Pliny the Elder

¹⁰⁹ **Genre influences:** Wiseman p. 27-28. **Hecataeus:** *FGrHist* 1F 1a, quoted in Marincola p. 225. **Hellanicus and Trojan War:** Thuc. 1. 97; Hdt. 2. 120. **Dionysius:** *Ant. Rom.* 1. 4. 2-3 and 1. 6. 1-3. **Polybius:** 1. 4. **Praise of Timaeus:** Cic. *De or.* 2. 58.

directly attacked a lost preface of Livy for apparently emphasizing the benefits accruing to the author from his writing rather than the good done to Rome. In the prefaces to the *Annals* and *Histories*, Tacitus worked to place in the mind of the reader a view of general decline in the veracity of historiography to match the decline in society's morals that he wished to portray, although he rarely named other writers. Writing perhaps a little under three hundred years later, the author of the SHA had no such inhibitions. He displayed his literary credentials by evoking the language of Sallust to roundly condemn Gallus Antipater's flattering account of the pretender Aureolus. This otherwise unknown historian was described as '...the handmaiden of honours and the dishonour of historians'. Velleius Paterculus listed the literary 'greats' of earlier generations. Although this appeared to be done in a generally positive frame of mind, elements of rivalry could not be avoided. Catullus was described as being 'second to none' as a poet, while it was noted of Sallust that he was 'the rival of Thucydides.' To express the idea of rivalry, Velleius had used the term *aemulatio*. While this can carry both the positive and negative connotations of striving to emulate and envious hostility, it is notable that Velleius had earlier used the same word in the definitely negative context of the attitude of the Carthaginians towards Rome. Interestingly, if only for assessment of the author's literary merits, his comment on Carthage reflected none other than that of Sallust himself.¹¹⁰

Examples could be multiplied, all indicating that competition for supremacy, stated and un-stated, was integral to ancient historiography. Plutarch discussed this potentially embarrassing matter with seeming candour, while at the same time ensuring that an impression was left of his superiority. He devoted one of his prefaces to the issue, taking to task the historian Timaeus for attempting to outdo '...what Thucydides has inimitably set forth'. However, while decrying as 'undignified and pedantic' competition with other writers' language and diction, Plutarch nevertheless quietly claimed his own superiority in presenting

'...those details which have escaped most writers, and which others have mentioned casually'.

¹¹⁰ **Latin polemic:** Marincola p. 236. **Livy :** Moles (1993) p. 155-156. **Call on the gods :** Livy Pref. 13. **Attack on Livy:** Plin. *NH*. pref. 16. **Antipater:** SHA *Claud.* 5. 3-4; Sall *Hist.* 1. 48. 22. **Velleius Paterculus:** Vell. Pat. 2. 36. 2-3, 2. 1. 1. **Sallust** *Cat.* 10; Lewis and Short p. 55; Wiedemann (2000) p. 525.

Josephus was less subtle in his approach. He provided a critique of Greek historians in general that was comprehensively damning. They were said to lack documentary evidence, to be more concerned with style than accuracy, to mix mythology and encomium with history, and to choose their subjects for the opportunity that they provided 'of outshining their rivals'. It can hardly be surprising, then, that rivalry and competition for honour featured so heavily in the subject matter of ancient historiography. This begs the question of whether the literary art was narrowly influencing the historical accounts or whether both literature and history were themselves shaped by competition and personal rivalry as wider features of contemporary culture. While the relevance of the purely literary factor must be acknowledged, the evidence of this thesis would certainly support the more general operation of a cultural dynamic of rivalry. Other evidence of the embedded nature of rivalry and the need to excel in ancient society is not hard to identify. Pindar had celebrated the victors, not those who came second, and winning was the transcendent goal of Greek and Roman sport. It is not without significance that the vocabulary of sporting and military victory was indistinguishable.¹¹¹

Personal honour and conflict: the state

The pressing need for members of ancient elites to enhance personal honour and distinction made it inevitable that a matching imperative would operate between nations. As expressed by Brunt,

'...if glory was a proper objective for the individual, it was such no less for the state.'

Ancient states jealously guarded their perceived honour, being quite willing to go to war in its defence. Examples could include the insult felt by Darius because of the Athenians' burning of Sardis, and in 395 BCE Sparta's wish to punish the 'insolence' of Thebes. A further example, again related to Sparta, illustrated both the connection between personal and 'state' honour, and the religiously based limits beyond which a desire for revenge should not go. After the Greek victory at Plataea in 479 BCE the proposal was made that the body of the dead Persian general, Mardonius, should be impaled in order to avenge the treatment given to the corpse of Leonidas at Thermopylae. The Spartan commander, Pausanias, indignantly refused the suggestion,

¹¹¹ **Competitive historiography:** Plut. *Nic.* 1. 1-5; Joseph. *Ap.* 1. 1. 2-5. **Sport and language:** Pind. *Ol.* 10. 59-75; McCormick (1986) p. 5.

citing both the number of Persian losses in the battle as adequate reparation for Thermopylae and a religious repugnance at the idea of desecrating a dead body.¹¹²

Of course, death itself, heroic death, could be a source of honour and glory for both the individual and the state. In the context of Roman myth/history, the archetype was Marcus Curtius, who averted disaster for the city by voluntarily plunging into a chasm that had opened in the Forum. Significantly described as ‘...a young soldier of great prowess’, it was clearly in that characterisation that he represented the necessary sacrifice of ‘...the chief strength of the Roman people.’ If the carrots of honour and glory proved inadequate to motivate the desired behaviour in soldiers, then some heavy sticks were at hand. As part of his explanation of Roman military strength, Polybius duly described the system of public praise, awards and decorations that operated for soldiers. However, these positive motivators were outlined only after he had detailed the gruesome practices of court-martial and decimation. Serious indiscipline and desertion by individuals could be punished by the offender being beaten to death. Even if as the result of ‘extreme pressure’ in battle, the fleeing of a whole section of troops could result in the random selection of one in ten of the survivors to meet the same fate. Polybius commented that this was

‘...the best possible practice both to inspire terror and to repair the harm done by any weakening of their warlike spirit.’

In the second century CE Appian could still emphasise and probably exaggerate decimation’s positive effects on the morale and success of legions in subsequent combat. He indicated that a decision to decimate a large body of men, (such as Julius Caesar’s sentence on the mutinous Ninth Legion at Placentia in 49 BCE), could lead to the execution of only a dozen soldiers. Nevertheless, it must be correct to view such practices as being integral to the aggressive and warlike Roman psyche. Appian went so far as to claim that a group of Caesar’s officers actually requested that decimation be applied to themselves, so ashamed were they about a defeat by Pompey at Dyrrhachium in 48 BCE. It must be indicative of the psychological aims of both processes that in court-martial and decimation it was the victims’ colleagues who carried out the brutal sentence. To emphasise the importance of military discipline on a smaller scale, Valerius Maximus provided the story of a consul who had a blood

¹¹² **States’ honour:** Brunt (1990) p. 442; Hdt. 5. 105; Xen. *Hell.* 3. 5. 5; Lendon (2000) p. 1-2.
Mardonius: Hdt. 7. 78-79; Lendon (2000) p. 13-14.

relation flogged and demoted to the infantry because a section of the camp wall for which he was responsible had been set on fire by the enemy. As an explanation for the even stricter action of T. Manlius Torquatus, who executed his own son for fighting victoriously, but against orders, Cicero could moralise that, 'Honour and esteem are the strongest guarantees of security in life.' In a similar vein, Sulla conveyed moral as well as practical advice to his troops when he said '...the less you strive to avoid danger the safer you will be.' At the level of the individual soldier, Josephus provided an example of Roman expectations. A cavalryman, who had been captured by the Jews during the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE, managed to escape. On returning to his own side, he was judged to be '...unfit to be a Roman soldier after being taken alive', and was dismissed from the legion, '...a penalty to one with any sense of shame severer than death.' The correct Roman behaviour in such circumstances was firmly established in the story of M. Atilius Regulus. Defeated and captured by the Carthaginians in 255 BCE, he was sent back to Rome by the victors to offer peace and a prisoner exchange. Under oath to return to Carthage with the senate's response, Regulus argued successfully against any such settlement. He then duly returned to Africa where he was tortured and killed. In his poetic rendition of the tale, Horace encapsulated its military moral:

'...Wool with dye once doctored
Never regains its initial colour;
True valour likewise once it is thrown away,
You'll never replace in the degenerate.'¹¹³

The behaviour of the senate after the disaster at Cannae in 216 BCE perhaps provided the clearest indication that this moral lesson had been internalised and that even defeat could be used to establish psychological supremacy. Hannibal had captured 8,000 Roman troops and returned a delegation of them to negotiate a ransomed release. After heated debate it was decided not to ransom the captives and to return the delegates to Hannibal. In Polybius' account the senate was credited with having deliberately countered the Carthaginians' hope, not only for money, but for a diminution of Rome's fighting spirit. He offered the view that

¹¹³ **Marcus Curtius:** Livy 7. 6. 1-5; Val. Max. 5. 6. 2. **Military motivators:** Polyb. 6. 36-39; App. *B Civ.* 1. 118-119, 2. 47, 2. 63; Shelton p. 349-350. **Camp wall:** Val. Max. 2. 7. 4. **Manlius Torquatus:** Flor. 1. 14. 1-2; Cic. *Fin.* 1. 35. **Sulla:** Sall. *Iug.* 107. **Jerusalem:** Joseph. *BJ* 6. 360-362. **Regulus:** Livy *Per.* 18; Eutr. 2. 25; Hor. *Carm.* 3. 5. 27-30.

‘...Hannibal experienced less joy from his victory than disappointment, when he saw with amazement the unshaken resolve and the lofty spirit which the Romans showed in their resolutions.’

Polybius used this story as a fitting conclusion to his detailed analysis of the strengths of the Roman constitution. Although he did not make the point so explicitly, Livy also underscored the story’s implied significance for Roman morale and its focus on psychological dominance. He achieved this in three ways: firstly by identifying the main senatorial speaker against the ransom as T. Manlius Torquatus, clearly evoking the steadfast spirit of that individual’s iconic ancestor; secondly by stressing the fact that military manpower was precisely what Rome lacked after Cannae, thus focussing attention on the senate’s higher motives; and thirdly by recording the positive reception given to the remnant of the army that had fought its way back to Rome after the battle. Livy concluded his account of these events by stressing the psychological dimension, stating that the consul, C. Terentius Varro, who led these troops, was praised for ‘...not having despaired of the commonwealth’. As expressed by Valerius Maximus, Hannibal ‘...battered the Romans’ strength rather than broke their spirit’. Plutarch stressed the psychological aspect of an earlier Roman setback. After defeat by Pyrrhus, the senate refused to sue for peace, instead agreeing that the Greek monarch must be ‘punished for his insults’ and for ‘...having enabled Tarantines and Samnites to mock at Romans’. As after Cannae, Roman prisoners who had been returned to the City were sent back to their captivity, thus symbolising Rome’s refusal to submit.¹¹⁴

Just as defeat by a rival could become an opportunity for the restatement of Rome’s refusal to accept a subservient position, so too complete a victory could be identified as undermining the moral fibre that underpinned the City’s honour and success. The conflict with Carthage again supplied a clear illustration. The final and complete defeat of the African city in 146 BCE provided Sallust with a turning point in the history of Rome; the ethics of ‘hard work and just dealing’ by which:

‘Mighty kings were vanquished, savage tribes and huge nations were brought to their knees’

dissolved through the subsequent easy access to wealth and leisure. The point was consciously echoed by Velleius Paterculus, who used it to mark the important division

¹¹⁴ **Cannae:** Polyb. 6. 58; Livy 22. 62; Val. Max. 3. 2. 11; Nicolet p. 90-91. **Pyrrhus:** Plut. *Pyrrh.* 19. 3 and 20. 5.

between the two books of his historical work. He explicitly pointed to the lack of an external threat and significant rival as being the cause of decline. The requirement for powerful adversaries was sufficiently established that it could be used by historians to bolster a particular contention. Josephus supported his claims about the scale of the Flavian Judean war by reference to Rome's demonstrable glory and the axiomatic argument, 'I fail to see how the conquerors of a puny people deserve to be accounted great'. In the same context he underlined the strength of the Roman desire to dominate by a typical piece of exaggeration. The author had Titus encourage his soldiers by suggesting that the Jews' motivation in fighting for 'liberty and country in jeopardy' was inferior to that of the Romans' desire for glory and

'...the determination, after having dominated the world, not to let the Jews be regarded as a match for ourselves.'¹¹⁵

The motive of psychological domination remained much to the fore as Rome confronted a more serious opponent. With a focus on the Augustan period, Brunt perceived the impossibility of peaceful co-existence with Parthia. He characterised earlier historical judgements to the contrary as being unrealistic and '...penned in the heyday of League of Nations Union idealism'; Rome's right to rule was unquestioningly assumed by the City's elite. Thus the '...mere existence of an independent power was menacing in its eyes' and constituted a just cause for war. A recent detailed survey of Roman Imperial iconography related to Parthia has suggested a more nuanced and relationship. Nevertheless, Septimius Severus' motive for an attack on Parthia was said to have been '...a desire for glory (rather) than any real necessity'. In 212 Caracalla was described as the aggressor in launching such a campaign under a pretext, when he was '...in reality eager to get the Parthian kingdom ...for himself'. Perhaps the only clear exception to this analysis was Artaxerxes' 227 CE campaign to restore the traditional maritime boundary between Asia and Europe. The psychological dimension of this situation was emphasised in that Severus Alexander, described as being predisposed to peace, 'found these affronts unendurable'.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ **Defeat of Carthage:** Sall. *Cat.* 10; Vell. Pat. 2. 1. 1. **Jewish war:** Joseph. *BJ* 1. 8, 3. 480.

¹¹⁶ **Relations with Parthia:** Brunt (1990) p. 456-457; Anderson p. 254-259. **Just cause for war:** Brunt (1990) p. 439. **Nuanced relationship:** Rose p. 66-67. **Septimius Severus:** SHA *Sev.* 15. 1. **Caracalla:** Cass. Dio 78. 1. 1-2. **Artaxerxes:** Cass. Dio 80. 3. 2; Herodian 6. 2. 1-3. **Severus Alexander:** Herodian 6. 3. 1.

The persistence of this outlook was clear, even in the face of adversity. The successes, diplomatic and military, of Augustus, Trajan and Lucius Verus were real but costly and temporary. They certainly did not match the scale of Crassus' fatal defeat at Carrhae in 53 BCE or the losses suffered by Antony's army in 36 BCE. Macrinus, although not formally defeated, was forced to come to terms after suffering severe losses in 217 CE. Severus Alexander's armies were badly mauled in 233. Fighting against Sasanid Persia during the third and fourth centuries CE involved the Roman Empire in a string of heavy defeats. Between the accession of Sapor I in 240 and the unfavourable partition of the Transcaucasus in 387 agreed by Theodosius I, a number of Roman emperors had tried to impose their will in the east. In spite of periodic successes, Gordian, Valerian, Carus, Galerius and Julian had all experienced major failure and some even death in the attempt. Although control over Armenia was, as in earlier centuries, a particular focus of conflict, neither the territorial imperative represented by that area, nor any other potential material benefits appear to justify the effort and cost involved.¹¹⁷

The precise causes of individual outbreaks of war are often unclear. The emperor Julian, in discussing the campaigns of Constantine I, referred vaguely to the Persians as needing to be punished because of a '...peace they somehow contrived to disturb'. An explicit desire for personal glory and for the domination of a proud opponent was, however, clearly cited in relation to the campaigns of Julian himself in 361-363. He was described as being 'aroused' to punish the Persians for their past 'misdeeds' and, 'inflamed besides with...a longing for war', it was said that he '...burned to add to the tokens of his glorious victories the surname *Parthicus*.' This assessment of motive paralleled that of Cassius Dio's judgement regarding Trajan's eastern ambitions. The not unusual 'pretext' of Persian wrong-doing in Armenia was dismissed and the real reason stated as the Emperor's 'desire to win renown'. The prominence of a desire for personal domination and glory as motivators for Rome's relations with other nations is particularly clear when an overview is taken of the actual conflicts with Parthia/Persia. As illustrated above, Brunt portrayed the relationship between two empires as that of

¹¹⁷ **Augustus:** Suet. *Aug* 20. **Trajan:** Cass. Dio 68. 28. 4-29. 4. **Lucius Verus:** Cass. Dio: 71. 3. 1. 1; Birley (1987) p. 141-142. **Crassus:** App. B *Civ.* 2. 18. **Antony:** Cass. Dio 49. 28. 1-4; Vell. Pat. 2. 82. 1-3. Goodman p. 36-37. **Macrinus:** Herodian 4. 15. **Severus Alexander:** Herodian 6. 5.9-6.3. **Defeats by the Sasanids:** Howard-Johnston p. 161-162. **Armenia and unclear causes:** Isaac (1998) p. 438.

inevitable competitors. Other commentators have stressed the Roman perception of their eastern neighbours as potentially treacherous and requiring consistent monitoring. Others again have been more explicit about the direct threat perceived by the Romans. However, it is instructive to note that the Romans were preponderantly the aggressors, a role consonant with their general motivation as outlined here. In this instance Brunt again noted the difficulty experienced by some earlier historians in accepting the unequivocal ancient attestations for this type of explanation. He went on to suggest that the glory to be won by dominating others was so far the most prized goal that it could often be left un-stated. Thus when in 6 CE a revolt in Pannonia caused Tiberius to delay a planned campaign against Maroboduus, King of the Marcomanni, Velleius Paterculus could state without commentary that: 'Thereupon, glory was sacrificed to necessity'. In relation to motivation, it is worth noting the personalised nature of the projected war and that it had been introduced by Velleius with the apparently adequate reasoning that:

'Nothing remained to be conquered in Germany except the people of the Marcomanni.'

This characterisation of the basic Roman outlook is consonant with the conclusions reached by students of the detail of the Empire's frontiers. Whittaker has suggested that Roman initiatives were usually accompanied by some resource planning, calculation of gain to be made and the establishment of immediately limited goals. However, he indicated that the primary drivers of action were the more general desires for glory and dominance.¹¹⁸

From outside the Greek world instances of the link between honour, war and revenge can be found, also invoking an important religious element. An inscription of the Babylonian king Ashurnasirpal II proclaimed that

'...the kings of all surrounding countries came to me, embraced my feet and I took hostages from them',

while in similar circumstances a text of his son and successor, Shalmaneser III, gave prominence to the fact that he '...paid homage to the greatness of all the great gods.' This link between the homage paid to kings by subjects/other rulers and the required

¹¹⁸ **Constantine:** Julian *Or.* 1. 18B. **Julian:** Amm. Marc. 22. 12. 1-2. **Trajan:** Cass. Dio 68. 17. 1; Brunt (1990) p. 441. **Overview:** Campbell (1993) p. 216-220; Luttwak p.18-19; Cornell (1993) p. 144; Isaac (1992) p. 28-33. **Tiberius:** Vell. Pat. 2. 110. 3, 2. 108. 1; Brunt (1990) p. 454. **Frontier studies:** Whittaker (2004) p. 33-37.

respect given to the gods may have operated in two ways. Firstly, it evoked the idea of the special personal relationship between the king and his people's gods or at least the divine source of the monarch's authority. Secondly, regardless of any actual or implied claims to personal divinity on the part of a monarch, the fact remained that paying honour and homage to the gods was the only real medium of respectful relationship open to humans. A god could not benefit from the tangible 'gifts' made to him, all such offerings being ultimately symbolic of deference/subservience. Thus, for a human ruler to be in receipt of such personal deference from other humans was indeed the highest possible form of honour. The psychological point may have still resonated in relation to the Roman people's demand for subservience from other nations. Although he is not generally credited with profound insights, Velleius Paterculus may have had this idea in mind, however unconsciously, when documenting the presumably fictitious account of the lone German's homage to Tiberius. This individual asked for and was granted permission to cross the River Elbe and to see the Roman ruler. The speech provided for the barbarian might be read as illustrating the relationship described above; the emperor as god, deference as his due, and resistance is pointless:

"Our young men are insane, for though they worship you as divine when absent, when you are present they fear your armies instead of trusting to your protection. But I, by your kind permission, Caesar, have today seen the gods".¹¹⁹

The primacy of military success and domination over others may be supported by the fact that *Victoria* was the most commonly depicted personification on Roman coinage. However, the thesis can also be illustrated through Rome's response to defeat and the negative assessments of emperors who failed to establish dominance over foreign peoples. It had clearly impressed Polybius that, following the disaster at Cannae in 216 BCE, the senate had judged the psychological advantage to be handed to Hannibal by ransoming the captured Roman troops too high a price for their return. Again in the aftermath of that defeat, and in spite of the threat to Rome itself, scarce military

¹¹⁹ **Babylon:** Pritchard p. 275-277. **Divine authority:** Seneca suggested that Nero should reflect on the rhetorical question:

'Have I of all mortals found favour with heaven and been chosen to serve on earth as vicar of the gods?' (*Clem.* 1. 1. 2.)

Tiberius and the German: Vell. Pat. 2. 107. 1-2.

resources were expended on the reduction of Capua and other Italian cities that had gone over to the Carthaginians. As expressed by Livy:

‘The enemy were compelled to admit the power of Rome to exact punishment from treacherous allies.’

After a matter-of-fact description of the various non-military means by which Tiberius maintained control over frontier states, Suetonius described the failures of this strategy after the Emperor’s retirement to Capri. The author noted both the dangers of this situation and ‘the disgrace to the Empire’. Cassius Dio condemned the sham victories of Domitian in Dacia, ridiculing his crowning of Diegis

‘...just as if he had truly conquered and could give the Dacians anyone he pleased to be their king.’

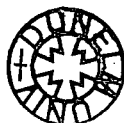
At its most serious, the failure of an emperor to establish a reputation for dominance over other nations led to his downfall. Compounded by the impression of his being ruled by his mother, the troops’ discontent with Severus Alexander focussed on the opinion that he had

‘...directed the campaigns carelessly and timidly. They reminded each other of the defeats in the East which had resulted from the Emperor’s negligence and of his failure to do anything courageous or vigorous when he faced the Germans.’

Severus Alexander was overthrown by the troops. Perhaps it is no coincidence that they replaced him with arguably the most soldierly of all emperors, Maximinus. He spent the whole of his three year reign with the army, never going to Rome or meeting the senate. In the late fourth century, the author of the SHA demonstrated, perhaps as clearly as anyone, the link between military success and legitimate Imperial authority. He had the defeated Zenobia explain to her captor, Aurelian, the reason for her assumption of power in Palmyra:

‘You, I know, are an emperor indeed, for you win victories, but Gallienus and Aureolus and the others I never regarded as emperors. Believing Victoria to be a woman like me, I desired to become a partner in the royal power...’¹²⁰

¹²⁰ **Victory**: Mattern p. 168. **Cannae**: Polyb. 6. 58; Livy 26. 16. **Tiberius**: Suet. *Tib.* 37, 41. **Domitian**: Cass. Dio 67. 7. 2-3. **Severus Alexander**: Herodian. 6. 8. 3. **Maximinus**: Herodian. 6. 8. 1-2; Campbell (1984) p. 53-55. **Zenobia**: SHA *Tyr. Trig.* 30. 23.



The emperor and the state

Initiated by Augustus' gradual and careful progress towards an unchallenged monopoly of power, a process was set in train that enabled the emperors to establish a synthesis of their own and Rome's status and an expectation of subservience. The combined narratives of Tacitus and Cassius Dio exemplified this process. They described the problem presented to Rome by the Parthian monarch, Artabanus III. Loyal to Rome while he remained 'in dread of Germanicus', the king was emboldened by success elsewhere to despise 'Tiberius' old age as defenceless' and to 'assume arrogance (*superbia*) against us'. In a direct challenge to Rome, he installed his son as King of Armenia and boasted that he would match the conquests of Cyrus and Alexander. Responses through diplomacy and subsidy, said by Tacitus to be typical of Tiberius' foreign policy, partially restored the situation. However, as described by Cassius Dio, Artabanus was planning to attack Syria '...since he had suffered no punishment for his invasion of Armenia', and the issue was only satisfactorily resolved under the new emperor, Gaius. The legate, Lucius Vitellius,

'...terrified the Parthian by coming upon him suddenly...and then...compelled him to sacrifice to the images of Augustus and Gaius'.¹²¹

A focus on Rome's assumption of dominance can help to explain actions that otherwise appear to defy logic. Some of the claims made about other nations can certainly seem extraordinary if not excessive. The idea that defeated enemies, nations that had become allies or even foreign rulers who had entered into treaties had in fact become part of her empire could be pursued to absurd lengths. Augustus' claim about the recovery of standards from the Parthians was elevated to one of military victory by its placement in the text of the *Res Gestae* amongst the record of conquests. Coin types of 20 BCE proclaiming '*Armenia Capta*' similarly exaggerated any reasonable assessment of the situation on the ground. The idea of psychological dominance as an overriding motivation may also contribute to an understanding of the apparently disproportionate effort put into some of Rome's military exploits. For example, by 73-74 CE the Judean revolt had been crushed. Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 and in the following year Vespasian and Titus had held a magnificent triumph. Nevertheless,

¹²¹ **Artabanus:** Tac. *Ann* 6. 31. 1-32. 1; Cass. Dio 59. 27. 2-3.

three years later the Romans spent months besieging a few hundred remaining fanatics at Machaerus and on the rock of Masada, operations that required the building of special siege engines, encircling walls and in the latter case a massive ramp still clearly visible today. As far as Machaerus was concerned Josephus stated that:

‘It was absolutely necessary to destroy this fortress, for fear that its strength might tempt large numbers to revolt...’.

However, he had stated only a few lines earlier that Vespasian had already established peace in the Empire and that the Jews were clearly beaten, a contention backed by the detail of the triumph. So why did the Romans expend so much effort? Josephus, although he does not ask himself the question explicitly, perhaps provided an answer. He confirmed the Roman drive to extinguish all opposition. After the fall of Masada

‘...nowhere was there an enemy left: the whole country had been subdued in the long war which had made itself felt by many even of the remotest inhabitants and had endangered their peace.’

That such a situation was intended to be a signal to any potential rebel can hardly be doubted. Psychology still seems to have been the best explanation for the action at Masada, even from the anachronistically modern perspective of international military strategy. Thus,

‘...the lesson of Masada was that the Romans would pursue rebellion even to the mountain tops in remote deserts to destroy its last vestiges, regardless of cost’.

Beyond its explicit context, such overwhelming application of force may also have been an example of a mindset that contributed to the ethos and reputation of Roman armies. It has certainly been suggested that Rome’s contemporary power and influence seemed greater than the numerical strength of its forces would indicate. At another level the long pair of final speeches provided by Josephus for the Jewish leader at Masada, Eleazar, found him pitting the authority of the Romans against that of the Hebrew god. Only by committing suicide, he successfully argued, could his followers establish their obedience to an ultimately victorious deity and thus avoid domination by the Romans. Josephus appeared to be suggesting that the power of Rome could be matched only by that of a deity.¹²²

¹²² **Claims:** RG 29.2; Lintott (1981) p. 65; Cas. Dio 54. 9. **Jerusalem:** Joseph. *BJ* 6. 403ff. **Triumph:** *ibid* 7. 121-157. **Machaerus:** Joseph 7. 163-209. **Masada:** *ibid* 7. 304ff; Luttwak p. 4. **Suicide:** Joseph. 7. 320-388, especially 386-387; Hansen p. 68-69.

Pliny the Younger deplored the situation in which the enemies of Rome had 'lifted up their heads' and dared to propose peace on equal terms. Trajan, the subject of his panegyric, had rectified this state of affairs:

'Now once more terror is in their midst; our enemies are afraid and crave permission to obey commands...The prayers and entreaties are on the other side, for us to grant or refuse at will...'

The longevity of the values here on show can be illustrated by the circumstances of the death of Valentinian I in 375 CE. He was reported to have been struck down by a fit of apoplectic indignation at the audacity of a delegation of Quadi voicing complaints about the building of Roman fortifications on the tribe's land. In a reversal of normally accepted Roman values, Tacitus had his British resistance leader, Calgacus, characterise as 'theft, murder and rape' the *imperium* that threatened the liberty of the island. Making the most of his rhetorical coup, the historian emphasised the upturned ideals of empire as, 'They make a desert and call it peace'. Set the right way up, the Roman ideological formulation had no difficulty in this area. Seneca suggested for Nero the thought that

'...all those many thousands of swords which my peace restrains will be drawn at my nod',

while Pliny the Elder encapsulated the thought as the '...boundless grandeur of the Roman peace'.¹²³

Composed during the confident period of the High Empire, Plutarch's biographies must necessarily reflect contemporary Imperial attitudes. It is therefore significant that he emphasised psychological dominance as a major aspect of his subjects' motivation and successes. In relation to achievement he compared Cimon unfavourably with Lucullus because whereas the former had

'...easily conquered the bodies of men whose spirits had been defeated beforehand...when Tigranes encountered Lucullus, he had known no defeat in many battles, and was in exultant mood'.

Writing in direct praise of Imperial achievements, the late second century CE historian Florus gave a clear indication of the Roman attitude towards other peoples. The

¹²³ **Trajan:** Plin. *Pan.* 11. 5-12. 2. **Valentinian:** Amm. Marc. 30. 6. 2-6. **Reversed values:** Tac. *Agr.* 30. **Nero:** Sen. *Clem.* 1. 1. 2. **Roman peace:** Plin. *NH* 27. 3; Woolf (1993).

conquest of territories that 'served no practical purpose' (which he identified as Armenia and Britain), was nevertheless worthwhile in that it added to Imperial prestige. He referred to

'...the proud and haughty necks of the nations, not yet accustomed to the reins of servitude...'

and to the fact that the Germans, on the eve of Varus' disaster in 9 CE, '...had been defeated rather than subdued'. Accentuating the underlying motives of Roman conquest, Florus mused in relation to Germany that '...its loss was a disgrace which far outweighed the glory of its acquisition.' However, having reviewed the campaigns under Augustus, Florus still permitted himself a ringing conclusion. Not only did he list the territories actually under Roman rule, but he declared that

'...the other nations too, who were not under the rule of the empire, yet felt the greatness of Rome and revered its people as the conqueror of the world'.

The establishment of psychological domination was thus acknowledged alongside military conquest. In the narrative of Florus, such domination was manifested in the embassies, gifts and tribute proffered by peoples outside the Empire. Augustus himself had, of course, brought the record of his foreign achievements to a similar climax, including the specific claim that barbarians not subject to direct military control had been forced '...to submit to the commands of the Roman people'. Even peace was defined in unmistakable terms of Roman domination. The word *pax* itself had roots in the idea of a pact after successful conflict, while the post-Augustan concept of *Pax Romana* is given a dictionary definition of 'dominion, empire, of the Romans'. It can be no coincidence that in Augustus' usage it was directly juxtaposed with '*victoriis*'. In giving expression to retrospective criticisms made about Augustus, Tacitus described the peace established by the first *princeps* as 'gory'. The historian emphasised that, 'Peace there had been without doubt after that...', where the 'that' referred to was Augustus' vanquishing of Antony. The same meaning of Roman peace could be evident from a situation in which Rome was not dominant; thus, Commodus was said to have initially refused the overtures of the Buri to end hostilities 'because they were strong', relenting only when they were exhausted.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ **Cimon and Lucullus:** Plut. *Synk.* 3. 5. **Florus:** 1. 47. 4, 2. 21. 12, 2. 30. 21; 2. 34. 61- 62. **Augustus and pax:** RG 30. 2 and 33; *ibid.* 13 and note by Brunt and Moore p. 54-55; Weinstock (1960) p. 45;

Without military victory to provide the necessary substance, even the most grandiose shows of psychological dominance could be made to seem hollow. Cassius Dio gave Nero's reception of Tiridates, ruler of Armenia, all the trappings of Roman supremacy over a subservient foreigner. Before he arrived in Rome in 66 CE the king's nine month progress was described in glossy fashion. At Rome he was received with lavish ceremony, although he was obliged to approach Nero through a corridor of heavily armed troops. Twice Tiridates made obeisance to the Emperor and was given the most obsequious speeches of obedience. Nero was portrayed as behaving in proper Imperial fashion, declaring:

'King of Armenia I now declare thee...I have the power to take away kingdoms and bestow them'.

Despite the public location of these formalities in the Forum, Cassius Dio had Nero stress the personal nature of Tiridates' deference:

'Well hast thou done to come hither in person, that meeting me face to face thou mightest enjoy my grace'.

Cassius Dio was not subtle in undermining the sham glory of this occasion. Tiridates was said to be 'quelling his pride' and playing a part suited to what he wanted. His true superiority was allowed to surface in his revulsion at Nero's public singing and play-acting as a chariot driver. The point was emphasised as the author followed this account by referring to the refusal of another eastern ruler, Vologaesius I of Parthia, to pay similar homage to Nero. In particular Cassius Dio noted that the angry Emperor failed to take military action in response to the snub. Tacitus had already recorded the unacceptable results of this type of situation. Weakness and military defeat combined to expose Roman troops to humiliation, possibly in its traditionally ultimate form of being obliged by an enemy to pass under the yoke.¹²⁵

Britain as an example

Of course, wars fought essentially for glory and psychological domination need not exclude financial profit. The advantages to be gained from Arabia could be clearly outlined by Strabo. Although the same author identified useful resources on the island of Britain, he concluded that military occupation was not necessary and that there was

Woolf (1993) p. 171-194; Lewis and Short p. 1320. **Antony:** Tac. *Ann.* 1. 10. 3-4. **Commodus:** Cass. Dio 72. 3. 1.

¹²⁵ **Tiridates and Nero:** Cass. Dio 63. 1. 2 - 7. 2; Tac. *Ann.* 15. 15. 2.

‘...nothing at all to fear from the Britons, for they are not powerful enough to cross over and attack us’.

It appeared to Strabo that the Britons’ isolation on their island put them outside the sphere of necessary Roman domination. In fact the history of Roman interventions in Britain is best explained in terms of ambition for glory and the requirement for subservience. Julius Caesar portrayed the expedition of 55 BCE as a reconnaissance in force. He emphasised the Romans’ psychological domination, for example, noting the Britons’ fear of unfamiliar ships. After initial warfare

‘...the chiefs began to come from all parts to solicit Caesar’s favour for themselves and for their tribes. Peace was established...’

on the basis of submission and hostages. From the perspective of the early third century CE, Cassius Dio reflected on the alarm experienced by the Britons at the Romans’ having ‘dared to cross over at all’ and expressed the view that Caesar

‘...had gained nothing from Britain except the glory of having led an expedition against it.’

Tacitus confirmed this assessment of the expedition.¹²⁶

Without further elaboration of his motives for the campaign in the following year, Caesar prefaced his account by the comment that only two of the British tribes had sent their promised hostages. Perhaps this indicated a need to re-establish Roman dominance, although Cassius Dio suggested that Caesar ‘coveted the island’ and the involvement of all but three of his eight legions in Gaul might be interpreted as implying longer-term goals. Against this possibility can be ranged Caesar’s own account of the campaign. Having recorded geographical and ethnographical information, he described the piecemeal subjugation of the tribes in south-eastern Britain, giving prominence to their promises ‘...to surrender and obey Caesar’s commands.’ Hostages and tribute were determined, and a Roman stamp was set on relationships between tribes. Finally, Caesar portrayed himself as withdrawing to Gaul at the onset of winter. Suetonius briefly dealt with Caesar’s activities in Britain in a way that stressed Roman initiative, the exoticism of the location and the practical deference forced from the population. Plutarch emphasised the second of these points, at the same time carefully noting the hostages and tribute. In addition, he questioned

¹²⁶ **Arabia:** 16. 4. 22. **Britain:** 4. 5. 2-3, 2. 5. 8; Isaac (1992) p. 384, 389. **Reconnaissance:** *B. Gall.* 1. 20. **Ships:** *B. Gall.* 1. 25. **Peace:** *B. Gall.* 1. 27-28, 36. **Assessment:** Cass. Dio 39. 51, 53; Tac. *Agr.* 13.

the value of the whole operation. Perhaps by so doing he confirmed both the deference/domination thesis and Strabo's assessment of the island. Contemporary references in Cicero's letters also made these points.¹²⁷

Augustus was said to have planned an expedition to Britain. The motives provided for him in our sources fitted clearly into the glory by dominance/subservience model. He was described as having desired success there 'in emulation of his father (Julius Caesar)' and '...since the inhabitants were unwilling to come to terms'. Without suggesting that it was second best in relation to the failure of these schemes to materialise, Augustus claimed that British kings 'sought refuge with me as suppliants'. That Britain represented the exotic and an ideologically charged focus for Roman ambitions was confirmed by its appearances in contemporary poetry. Thus:

'Look after Caesar who is about to attack
The world's-end Britons'

and:

'.....Augustus will prove a God
On earth by adding to the Empire
Troublesome Parthians and Britanni.'¹²⁸

Perhaps at its most extreme this psychological supremacy needed little manifestation outside the minds of emperors or other Romans. The accounts we have from Suetonius and Cassius Dio depict the military activities of Gaius as being quite eccentric if not actually the products of madness. However, despite distracting details such as a cavalry attack on a grove of trees and the collection of sea shells by legions drawn up in battle line, the Emperor's antics may still reflect the fundamental Roman world view. Making the most of an apparently fortuitous submission offered by a renegade British prince, Adminius, Gaius sailed a short distance on Ocean. He then ordered that the triremes so employed should be sent back to Rome in preparation for a triumph, clearly signifying the deliberate symbolism of the sailing trip as an extension of Roman *imperium* to Britain. Support for the Emperor's adherence to the proper ideals of dominance/subservience can even be found in explanations of the apparently senseless

¹²⁷ Hostages: *B. Gall.* 4. 38. Cassius Dio: 40. 1. Legions: *B. Gall.* 5. 8. Geography, etc: *B. Gall.* 5. 12-14. British surrender and Roman withdrawal: *B. Gall.* 5. 20-22. Suetonius: *Jul.* 25. Plutarch: *Caes.* 23. 3. Cicero: *Att.* 4. 18.

¹²⁸ Augustus: Cass. Dio 49. 38. 2, 53. 25. 2; RG 32. 1. Poetry: Hor. *Carm.* 1. 35. 29-30, 3. 5. 2-4.

shells incident. It has been suggested that this detail was the product of our sources' hostile view of Gaius. Those authors may have misinterpreted or deliberately distorted their own sources' accounts of the rational collection of small boats, inventively substituting shells to reinforce the image of Gaius' behaviour as being outside Imperial norms.¹²⁹

Suetonius' account of the Claudian invasion left no doubt about the Emperor's motives. Dissatisfied with his previous military honours, Claudius was said to have sought a full triumph by an easy success in Britain. Briefly noting the surrender of the island, 'Without a battle or a drop of blood being shed', the biographer concentrated on a description of the resulting triumph. Cassius Dio gave the Emperor a larger role in the military aspects of the invasion. Although he made no direct allusion to Claudius' motives for the expedition, the author had noted earlier that he became Emperor '...without having been previously tested at all in any position of authority'. Like Suetonius, Cassius Dio gave prominence to the Emperor's journey to the remote island and to the domination gained '...over numerous tribes, in some cases by capitulation, in others by force'. In a later episode, the dominance/subservience theme was individualised by Tacitus in the person of the captured Caratacus. Claudius was described as deliberately exaggerating his prisoner's merits in order to 'enlarge his own reputation.' The historian gave Caratacus his own part in the discourse by having the conquered Briton recognise that his own fall necessarily brought glory to the Emperor:

'My present lot is as much a source of glory to you as it is degrading to myself'.

Of course the official account underlined all the positives in the Emperor's actions. The inscription on his triumphal arch emphasised the victory over British kings and the extension of Roman dominance over peoples 'beyond Ocean'. A modern account of the invasion's importance for Claudius is explicit about its particular value to the Emperor:

'For Claudius...his invasion of Britain was the greatest event of the reign and one of his prime claims to rule, as his systematic exploitation of it shows.'

¹²⁹ **Gaius:** Suet. *Calig.* 44-47; Cass. Dio 59. 25. 2-3; Malloch (2000a); Woods p. 85-86..

However, the same author appears to be largely oblivious to the island's continuing role as a source of vital glory to subsequent Roman rulers. Instead she repeats the rather tired calculation of material costs and benefits of occupation, on the basis of which the invasion was deemed to be a 'mistake'.¹³⁰

It was in consideration of the potential loss of glory, if only that of his 'father', Claudius, that Nero was said to have changed his mind about abandoning Britain. As governor from 58 CE, G. Suetonius Paulinus was popularly regarded to have been motivated to conquer more of the island by a desire to match the glory won by Corbulo in Armenia. In this, as in the Boudiccan revolt, modern scholars have looked to play down the personal element in motives, but within the framework presented here, perhaps alternative perspectives are unnecessary. Again, Tacitus' account of Agricola's campaigns included the fame and glory won by his father-in-law, even if not actively sought, and Calgacus' characterisation of Roman motivation as being driven solely by a desire to conquer, indifferent to practical gain. Agricola was provided with a speech straightforwardly linking the enemy's existence with its subservience:

'The furthest point of Britain is no longer a matter of report or rumour:
we hold it...Britain has been discovered and subjugated'

Tacitus explained the necessity of Agricola's unusual reticence in claiming the glory that naturally fell to him as a result of these successes. Emphasising the political significance of psychological supremacy, the panegyrist gave a dismal account of Domitian's own military exploits, adding that:

'What he dreaded most of all was for the name of a subject to be exalted
above that of the emperor.'¹³¹

A relatively blank period in the record of Roman Britain then followed, providing little evidence to illuminate Imperial politics. With the reign of Hadrian, the Emperor appeared to have settled for peace and security rather than the glory of expansion. However, some indications, including of course the Wall itself, may suggest more military activity than is clearly reported. Thus, for Judea, where Hadrian certainly

¹³⁰ **Claudius' motives:** Suet. *Claud.* 17; Cass. Dio 60. 2. 1, 21. 2-4, 23. 1; Mann, J.C. (1979) p. 178.

Inscription: Ireland 56. **Modern account:** Levick (1990) p. 147-148.

¹³¹ **Nero:** Suet. *Ner.* 18. **Suetonius Paulinus and Boudicca:** Tac. *Ann.* 14. 29-31. **Alternative perspectives and support for Tacitus:** Ireland p. 63; Cass. Dio 62. 1-2; Syme (1958b) p. 62-66. **Unsought fame:** Tac. *Agr.* 18. **Calgacus:** *ibid.* 30. **Subjugation:** *ibid.* 33. **Domitian:** *ibid.* 39.

showed no sign of reluctance to demonstrate Roman dominance, we are told that he required his best generals. That the

‘...first of these, Julius Severus, (was) dispatched from Britain where he was governor’

at least hints at military activity there. Certainly we have tantalising glimpses of war in Britain having added to the military tasks of Marcus Aurelius. Even though the record appeared to be one of Roman response to attacks from outside the Empire, the language used included the standard indications of defeating powerful enemies and complete domination. In relation to the Danube

‘...he conquered these exceedingly fierce peoples, accepted the surrender of the Marcomanni, and brought a great number of them to Italy.’

The record of British involvement during the reign of Commodus concentrated on the turbulent relationship between that emperor and his generals. However, when enemy tribes ‘crossed the wall’, one of these generals, Ulpian Marcellus, was said to have responded in a manner that ‘...inflicted major defeats on the barbarians’, the language yet again focusing on the establishment of supremacy rather than regaining territory. On the assassination of Commodus, the last years of the second century CE saw Britain and the legions stationed there as significant factors in the resultant civil wars.¹³²

Once firmly on the throne, Septimius Severus was said to have responded to news of unrest in Britain by a clear restatement of the island’s role as a source of potential military glory:

‘Severus...being a natural lover of glory...wanted to raise some victory-trophies at the expense of the Britons to add to the victories and titles won in the east and north’.

There is ample evidence that on major expeditions the Emperor had made a habit of taking with him large portions of his family and court, for example to Parthia in 197 and to Africa in 202. Nevertheless, Cassius Dio claimed that the Emperor hoped in particular that an expedition to Britain would help to instil necessary martial spirit into his sons, Caracalla and Geta. In pursuit of these aims, Severus rejected British offers of

¹³² **Hadrian:** Cass. Dio 69. 13. 2. **Marcus Aurelius:** SHA *Marc.* 8. 7, 22. 1-2. **Commodus and his generals:** SHA *Comm.* 6. 1-2; SHA *Pert.* 3. 5-10; Cass. Dio 72. 9. **Marcellus:** Cass. Dio 72. 8. **Civil wars:** Cass. Dio 73. 14. 3; Herodian. 2. 15. 1-5.

peace until he had marched his army to 'the extremity of the island'. Only then did he feel that he had 'forced the Britons to come to terms'.¹³³

In the second half of the third century Britain became an element in various Roman elite and army-based secessions from central authority. Panegyrics referring to the re-establishment of control over the island laid stress on both the physical and ideological value of Britain. Constantius Chlorus was praised for recovering the material goods of Britain, but the eulogy evoked Julius Caesar, who 'had discovered another world'. Elsewhere, each of the Tetrarchs was recognised for his achievements in crushing various barbarian races, making them subject to Imperial clemency or, in Britain's case, '...raising up their muddled heads from woods and waves.' The author of a panegyric to Constantine neatly reversed the usual pattern of attributing glory to the conqueror of a territory when he exclaimed:

'O Britain, fortunate and happier now than all the lands to have been the first to have seen Constantine Caesar!'

Britain was given a prominent place in another panegyric to Constantine that used the theme of the surrender of enemy peoples. Domination of nature and of the Britons reappeared as a theme in relation to Constantine's son, Constans, during an unusual winter visit to the island:

'Sous vos rames a tremblé l'onde d'une mer qui nous est actuellement presque inconnue, et le Breton fut pris de panique à la vue d'un empereur qu'il n'attendit pas. Que voulez-vous de plus? Vaincus, les éléments se sont inclinés devant votre valeur.'

In 367 CE, during the reign of Valentinian, Theodosius (the father of the future emperor) campaigned in Britain. At this stage the island and its loyal inhabitants could be discussed by our sources as a settled element of the Empire, 'us' rather than 'them'. Accordingly, Theodosius '...rendered the greatest aid to the troubled and confused fortunes of the Britons'. However, the basic ideology of dominance/subservience remained central, its focus shifting to those now regarded as operating outside the authority of Rome. Thus, Theodosius

'...routed and put to flight various tribes which an insolence fostered by impunity was inflaming with a desire to attack the Romans.'

¹³³ **Septimius Severus and glory:** Herodian. 3. 14. 2-3. **Family and court:** Birley (1988) p. 129, 146. **Sons:** Cass. Dio 76. 11. 1. **Campaign:** ibid. 76. 13. 3-4.

Ammianus' rhetoric suggested that it was the very failure of Rome to impose its will that had incited the marauding Picts and Scots to greater excesses of impudence and daring. In these writings of the late fourth century CE there is an unmistakable echo of sentiments expressed over 400 years earlier by Julius Caesar.¹³⁴

Roman militarism: the authority and behaviour of emperors

An underlying factor in the general reputation of an emperor and in assessments of his dealings with other peoples was the importance of military discipline in the self-perception of Romans. The importance of this concept has already been touched upon in the reference to the fate of the son of Manlius Torquatus (see page 95). Livy appeared to be particularly interested in this theme. He had introduced it in the context of one father executing a disobedient son (Aulus Postumius), elaborated it in the better known story of Torquatus, and developed it further in the more detailed story of the similar dispute between the dictator, L. Papirius Cursor and his master of horse, Q. Fabius Maximus Rullianus. On his own initiative, the latter had successfully attacked the Samnites, despite the fact that the former had ordered him to take no action in his absence. In response the dictator invoked Manlius Torquatus in a demand that Fabius be punished. Livy painted a vivid picture of Fabius as a hero favoured for his exploits by the senate, soldiers and people of Rome, while Papirius was portrayed as a harsh and isolated disciplinarian. Nevertheless, with mutiny and civil disorder threatening, only an appeal for clemency by the assembled people and an admission of error by Fabius allowed the dictator to relent. Even then he was at pains to underline the sacrosanct nature of military discipline by insisting that Fabius retained his guilt and as such he was '...offered as a gift to the people of Rome'. In fact the story did not end there. Livy added a postscript that subtly indicated a requirement that such harshness needed to be moderated to ensure success. On his return to the army Papirius found that the soldiers '...held back and deliberately prevented a victory' because of resentment about the treatment of Fabius. Livy had Papirius involve himself in the clearly symbolic act of personally tending to sick soldiers in order to regain the goodwill of the troops. In this way Papirius re-established the necessary balance, so much so that when

¹³⁴ Constantius Chlorus: Pan. Lat. 8. 11. 1-4, 17. 3. Tetrarchs: ibid. 9. 21. 1-2. Constantine: ibid. 6. 9. 1, 12. 25. 1-2. Constans: Firm. Mat. Err. Prof. Rel. 28. 6. Theodosius: Amm. Marc. 28. 3. 1-2. Julius Caesar: B. Gall. 1. 33; see pages 79-80.

‘...the army was restored, (it) so completely defeated...the Samnites that this was the last day they ever joined battle with him’.¹³⁵

The pervasiveness of military discipline as a valued characteristic is illustrated by the fact that it was a commonplace among ancient historiographers and other writers to proclaim and expound Roman success predominantly in terms of martial qualities. In his preface, Polybius first introduced the general idea of *tyche* as guiding events. However, when he turned towards human causes he quickly cited the Romans’ ‘...martial valour and their consistent success in the field’, describing them as ‘...veritable champions in the art of war (in which) they showed great courage’. Note has already been made of Livy’s use, in his preface and Book 1 of his history, of the Romulus myth in order to characterise Rome’s military qualities. In yet other prefaces, Appian described the success of the Roman people as stemming from the fact that they ‘...excelled all others in bravery, patience, and hard labour’, while Florus simply equated the Empire with the Roman people having ‘...extended their arms throughout the world’. The importance to Aemilius Paullus of Roman military tradition was emphasised in Plutarch’s account. The general was said to be so keen to disseminate the necessary virtues and discipline that he considered

‘...the conquest of his enemies hardly more than an accessory to the training of his fellow citizens’.

The effects on others of specific aspects of Roman military discipline have been used to emphasise the martial qualities of the City’s inhabitants. Pyrrhus, a figure as soldierly as any of Plutarch’s subjects, was said to have been impressed by its order and discipline when he encountered a Roman camp for the first time.¹³⁶

Mattern has explored military domination as an aspect of Rome’s relationship with peoples outside the Empire. She did this in a way that may also provide a useful perspective on the emperor’s over-all authority. In essence, her analysis presented Rome’s response to external nations as a reflection of one of the core elements of Roman elite society. Thus the Romans

¹³⁵ **Torquatus:** Livy 8. 7. **Postumius:** *ibid.* 4. 19. 5-6. **Papirius and Fabius:** *ibid.* 8. 30-36.

¹³⁶ **Commonplace:** Val. Max. 2. 7. *prae*f; Polyb. 1. 4, 6; Livy (see pages 45-46); App. *Pref.* 11; Flor. 1. 1; Plut. *Aem.* 3. 4; Plut. *Pyrrh.* 16. 4-5.

‘...perceived foreign relations as a competition for honour and status between Rome and barbarian peoples; by proving its superior force through war and conquest, Rome extorts deference and reverence from other nations, who then remain submissive, refraining from revolt or attack.’

Such a view is broadly reinforced by studies of Roman policy in areas where the Empire was contiguous with non-Roman centres of power. In this context it is a fair summary to describe the approach as one motivated by a desire for honour, glory and domination. In establishing a link between Roman *imperium* in relation to foreigners and the authority of the emperor it is possible to call upon sociological theorising. Max Weber considered the socio-political factors in the operation of government and noted that:

‘A tendency towards centralisation of power goes very readily with a chronically conquering imperialism’¹³⁷

Violence, peace and the behaviour of emperors.

The SHA recounted a story in which Hadrian and the renowned rhetorician, Favorinus, disagreed about an instance of linguistic usage. Although the intellectual consensus was reported to support the opinion of Favorinus, the sage nevertheless gave way to the emperor, justifying his concession by remarking, ‘...suffer me to regard as the most learned of men the one who has thirty legions’. Although the quotation was described as a joke, the immediate literary context of the story was far from comic. It followed a grizzly account of Hadrian’s suspicious and vengeful behaviour towards friends, officials, freedmen and even soldiers. In particular this account detailed the harsh treatment of those about whom there was any hint of challenge to his authority in general or aspiration to the throne in particular. As if to underline this point about the Emperor’s nature, the SHA author had used the Favorinus incident to show how far Hadrian would go in jealous defence of his supremacy, extending even to matters both trivial and patently beyond his competence. Cassius Dio had written in a similar vein, juxtaposing allusions to Hadrian’s execution of suspected rivals and to his intellectual arrogance. To illustrate these elements of the emperor’s character, Dio deployed the story of his spiteful execution of Apollodorus. Apparently Hadrian held a grudge,

¹³⁷ External relations: Mattern p. 171; Isaac (1992) p. 387-392. Sociology: Weber (1948) p. 162.

having been slighted by the architect as a youth and for his disagreeing with him over the plans for a temple when emperor. Hadrian was also said to have 'abolished Homer', replacing him at the pinnacle of the literary canon with Antimachus. Although the latter was not without admirers (Plato and, in a qualified way, Quintilian and Plutarch), there does seem to be something climactic in Dio's choice of this act to demonstrate the Emperor's overblown sense of physical and intellectual omnipotence.¹³⁸

Minor as some of these incidents may appear, it is one of the main tasks of this thesis to investigate the extent to which the idea underlying Favorinus' quip could be said to permeate the political ideology of both rulers and ruled in Imperial Rome. To consider this issue a number of general and specific questions need to be addressed. How significant was the threat and reality of coercion within the totality of whatever it was that underpinned the authority of Roman emperors? For those exercising power and those subject to it, how close to the surface were thoughts of the violent consequences of disobedience? How were such considerations rationalised within the ideology of the time? What aspects of political and other behaviour demonstrated the operation these factors?

Although the preserved text does not contain the full argument, Cicero's *Republic* articulated the standard Roman view of the justice of the strong ruling over the weak. The weak were said to benefit from such a situation in the same way that man, the body and the baser instincts were in turn favoured by submission respectively to god, the mind and reason. The naturalness of this state of affairs was reflected in Aristotle's argument:

'For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient'.

Thucydides had his Athenian delegation articulate a similar idea during the debate at Sparta; 'It has always been a rule that the weak should be subject to the strong'. The same speakers applied this idea to the concept of empire, declaring its acquisition and retention to be in accordance with 'human nature', motivated by desire for 'security, honour and self-interest.' The argument was taken a step further in the Melian

¹³⁸ Favorinus: SHA *Had.* 15. Apollodorus: Cass. Dio 69. 2.5-4.6. Antimachus: OCD3 p. 106; Birley (1997) p. 193-195.

dialogue. There Thucydides' Athenians declared that '...it is a general and necessary law of nature to rule whatever one can.' To justify this position, a particular ethical position was invoked:

'...the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and ...in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.'¹³⁹

In a Roman Imperial context these ideas could be expressed in ways that both justified empire and individual subservience to the emperor. Aelius Aristides declared that the Romans 'alone are natural rulers.' He contrasted the rule of Rome with that of earlier empires on the basis that only Roman government specifically benefited all those subject to it. Evidence for this was cited as the willingness of local elites to participate in Roman administration, general economic benefits and the common defence of the whole empire as if it was a single city. Aristides went so far as to declare that through the operation of law and proper administration, the Romans '...were the only ones ever to rule over free men.'¹⁴⁰

Of course, a clearly perceived problem arose in conceptualizing such freedom in the context of the sole rule of emperors. As in so many of the political issues that attended the development of Roman Imperial government, precedents can be identified here in the regimes of the *diadochoi*. In episodes that found later counterparts in both the Republic and the Empire, rival Hellenistic kings, Antigonos and Ptolemy, declared in 314 BCE policies of freedom (*autonomia*) for the Greek cities. Antigonos was portrayed as subsequently 'liberating' Athens in 307 BCE, but his imposition of a governor and prescriptive restoration of 'democracy' clearly troubled Plutarch. Epictetus pointed to the contradictions inherent in this situation by recalling an oath of the inhabitants of Nicopolis, where he taught his second century CE version of Stoic values. The oath ran, 'Yea, by the fortune of Caesar, we are free'. His analysis demonstrated that on such a basis everyone, including a man of noble family who had been consul twice, was in fact a slave. Pliny attempted to solve the problem in his panegyric of Trajan. The panegyrist simply added to the list of the Emperor's merits

¹³⁹ Roman/Athenian attitudes to empire: Brunt (1978) p. 161-162. Strong rule the weak: Cic. *Resp.* 3. 37; Arist. *Pol.* 1254a; Thuc. 1. 76, 5. 105, 5. 89.

¹⁴⁰ Natural rulers: *Or.* 26. 91. Benefits of empire: *ibid.* 19, 11. Local elites: *ibid.* 64. Defence: *ibid.* 80. Freedom: *ibid.* 36.

presented to the senate that he ‘...exhorted us, individually and collectively, to resume our freedom’. The point was sharpened as, ‘You bid (*iubes*) us to be free, and we shall be free’. Pliny added the interesting comment that, ‘All your predecessors had said the same, but none had been believed’ in the previously prevailing atmosphere of suspicion and terror. Although it of course raised another problem, that is, the relationship between the king/ruler and the divine, an attempt could be made to portray subservience to an all powerful ruler as being acceptable by having recourse to Cicero’s analogy of god’s authority over man. Dio Chrysostom made the direct appeal:

‘...it is natural for the stronger to govern and care for the weaker.

However there could be no more striking or beautiful illustration than that government of the universe which is under the control of the first and best god.’

It was also true that such arguments could be challenged if not slyly subverted. Plutarch elaborated Livy’s story of the Gauls’ attack on Clusium in the early fourth century BCE. In both versions the Romans were said to have come to the aid of their allied city and to have asked the Gauls what wrong they had suffered that justified their attack. The reply fashioned by the biographer had Brennus, king of the Gauls, point out that while the citizens of Clusium were rich and held much land, the Gauls were poor and needed room to expand. Having cited

‘...that most ancient of all laws which gives to the stronger the goods of his weaker neighbours’,

Brennus pointedly reminded the Romans that their disapproval of the Gauls’ behaviour belied their own history of expansion at the cost of less powerful neighbours.¹⁴¹

The pervasiveness of military elements in Roman ideology could be demonstrated by their appearance in some less expected places. In his speech giving fulsome praise to the majesty of Roman peace, Aristides felt the need to make the closest possible connection with war. He directly acknowledged the paradox involved in Rome’s warlike nature leading to a situation in which, ‘It is no longer even believed that wars ever took place’. Again, ‘Such great peace do you have, even if war is native to you’ is immediately followed by 18 chapters of detail about the peerless organisation and

¹⁴¹ **Diadochoi:** Shipley p. 73-74; Austin (1981) 29, 31; Plut. *Demetr.* 10. 2. **Nicopolis:** Arr. *Epict. diss.* 4. 1. 3-14. **Trajan:** *Pan.* 66. 2-4. **Divine sanction:** Dio Chrys. 3. 50. **Clusium:** Livy 5. 36; Plut. *Cam.* 17. 2-4.

operation of the Roman army. It is perhaps less surprising that Polybius, in an earlier age, should also have stressed the strength of Rome's military heritage as integral to its internal stability and external achievement. He elevated these two features to become the bases of any people's success, since

‘...every state relies for its preservation on two fundamental qualities, namely bravery in the face of the enemy, and harmony among its citizens.’

In the task he set himself, that of explaining how Rome came to be so dominant, Polybius emphasised the prominence given to exemplars of military bravery, for example in his famous description of the funerals of ‘celebrated men.’ As Aristides was to do more than two hundred years later, he supported these general points with detail about Roman military organisation. In fact, this section of the extant text follows directly upon chapters describing the Roman constitution as providing the city with ‘...an irresistible power to achieve any goal it has set itself.’ It does not seem unreasonable to speculate that a linking section, now missing, would have cemented the connection between Polybius’ assessment of Roman general success and the City’s military ideology. While it may be reasonable to interpret Polybius as emphasising Roman moral superiority, the virtue on the mind of the historian was surely that chiefly displayed during the described elite funerals, that is, manly *virtus*.¹⁴²

Coercion and terror can also make some rather unexpected and apparently out of character appearances. As his first act on becoming emperor, Trajan had promised the senate ‘...that he would not slay nor disenfranchise any good man.’ In Cassius Dio’s account, his very next action was to trick into attendance on him, and then have executed, Aelianus and other Praetorians who had rebelled against Nerva. While it is clear that these individuals were meant to be seen as the opposite of ‘good men’, the demonstration of power and the example to all who might rebel could hardly have been more pointed. The Emperor’s gesture to Aelianus’ successor as Praetorian Prefect, Attius Suburanus, in handing to him his sword of office with the declamation,

‘Take this sword in order that, if I rule well, you may use it for me, but if ill, against me’,

¹⁴² Aristides: *Or.* 26. 70-89. Warlike focus: Polyb. 6. 52. Bravery and harmony: *ibid.* 6. 46. Roman success: *ibid.* 1. 1. Funerals: *ibid.* 6. 53-54. Military organisation: *ibid.* 6. 19-42. Power of the constitution: *ibid.* 6. 18. Linking section: Walbank p. 132. Moral superiority: Dvornik p. 458.

appeared sufficiently theatrical to be a deliberate counterweight to this incident of terror. In the context of the loyalty or otherwise of the Praetorians, it is also worth noting that Trajan replaced them as his personal guard with a force of mainly Batavian cavalry. The *optimus princeps* intended to be protected.¹⁴³

At the same time a fairly commonplace distinction was drawn in antiquity between kingship and tyranny. Both the distinction and an element of its consequences were outlined by Aristotle:

‘For kings rule according to law over voluntary subjects, but tyrants over involuntary; and the one are guarded by their fellow citizens, the others are guarded against them.’

Plutarch demonstrated the recycling of this literary contrast in his didactic aphorism, ‘For, in reality, kings fear for their subjects, but tyrants fear their subjects.’ At least giving him credit for a good turn of phrase, Suetonius had Domitian quip that

‘...the situation of emperors was a most wretched one, for everyone thought their suspicions of conspiracy groundless until they were killed.’

In explaining the purpose of his *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon stated his thesis that Cyrus remarkably ‘...excelled in ruling human beings.’ Perhaps that was why the Persian appeared to combine all the features of Aristotle’s analysis. He was said to have ruled through fear and intimidation on the one hand and on the other by inspiring willing loyalty. Nevertheless, the King’s recorded methods of coercion provided an imaginative list that would not have been out of place in the repertoire of any calculating and harsh tyrant. He employed eunuchs as his personal bodyguard, on the basis that, of all men, they were least likely to have ties with family or elsewhere and thus threatening their loyalty to the king (see page 40). Cyrus sought to breed competition between his officers and courtiers, for example, in proximity to the king during banquets. As modelled by Herodotus’ Deioces, he employed a sophisticated network of spies and informers, ‘the eyes and ears of the king.’ In addition Cyrus saw the intimidatory value of grand military parades. That obedience to Cyrus as a king

¹⁴³ **Aelianus:** Cass. Dio 68. 5. 2-4. **Suburanus:** Cass. Dio 68. 16. 1; Bennett p. 51. **Bodyguards:** Birley (1997) p. 38-39

could be enforced by physical violence had been noted during the games of his youth.¹⁴⁴

Xenophon also described the negative effects of the tyrant's necessary preoccupation with physical security, going beyond this to suggest that a ruler without checks on his power gained no pleasure from his position. His Hiero, tyrant of Syracuse, argued that such a ruler had less access to basic physical pleasures than an ordinary citizen. Fears for his safety and of revolts restricted his travel to see interesting things at home and abroad. His hearing was sated by applause and flattery, his appetite for food and drink by over-familiarity with abundance and unnatural delicacies. Even the tyrant's pleasure in sex was dulled by too ready availability and by the subservience of all partners. In a similar vein, any prestige or respect that a tyrant might obtain from his subjects is devalued because it is based on fear rather than recognition of true value in the ruler.¹⁴⁵

These arguments were regularly taken further in philosophical/didactic contexts. Isocrates had advised the young Cypriot monarch, Nicocles, to:

‘Consider the most secure physical defence to be the virtue of friends, the goodwill of the citizens, and your own wisdom.’

Plutarch imparted a similar lesson when he described Demetrius coming into his father's presence inadvertently armed. The biographer portrayed Antigonus as drawing his son's behaviour to the attention of visiting ambassadors, with the claim that it demonstrated the trust and goodwill that existed in his court. However, Plutarch used the incident to illustrate the opposite conclusion, that Antigonus' kingdom must have been ‘utterly unsociable’ and ‘full of ill-will’ for a father to ‘...make it a thing of glory that he was not afraid of his son’. In recounting the colourful story of the precautions taken by Aristippus of Argos, Plutarch elaborated on the discomfort experienced by tyrants on this head. Besides sleeping in a small room accessible only by a ladder that he had removed each night, Aristippus was said to have ‘...kept many guards to protect his person’ and to have spearmen camped around his palace. To underline the point, the biographer contrasted this situation with that of Aratus of Sicyon, whose security was said to be that of the ‘...steadfast goodwill on the part of the ruled.’ In his literary

¹⁴⁴ **Kingship and tyranny:** Arist. *Pol.* 1285a; Plut. *Mor.* 781E; Suetonius, *Dom.* 21. **Coercion and loyalty:** Xen. *Cyr.* 1. 1. 5-6. **Eunuchs:** ibid. 7. 5.59-60. **Competition:** ibid.8. 2. 26-28. **Spies:** ibid. 8. 2. 10; Hdt. 1. 100; Dio Chrys.*Or.* 3. 118; Philostr. *VA* 1. 28. **Parades:** *Cyr.* 8. 2. 1. **Youth:** Hdt. 114-115.

¹⁴⁵ **A tyrants problems:** *Hier.* 1. 10-38 and 7. 5-10.

attempt to mould the behaviour of Nero, Seneca used an account of Augustus' response to plots against his life. The author provided the first *princeps* with an extended internal debate about how he should treat the exposed plotter, Cinna. This was placed in the context of the young Octavian's involvement in killings and proscriptions before he had secured his sole authority. The mature ruler wrestled with the conflicting claims of justice and clemency, reaching an anguished conclusion that, 'If so many must perish in order that I may not, my life is not worth the price'. However, after Augustus had spared and even honoured Cinna, with the gratifyingly convenient result that, 'No one plotted against him further', it is noteworthy that Seneca drew the moral for Nero that:

'Your great-grandfather spared the vanquished; for if he had not spared them, whom would he have had to rule?'

Thus, even in the course of counselling clemency, there was no escaping the emperor's physical domination of subjects.¹⁴⁶

A similar message emerged from Dio Chrysostom's laudatory/didactic/display oratory. He defined the good king as one whose security was based on his subjects' acknowledgement of the justice of his rule, a lesson that the orator had the sage Diogenes impart to Alexander. The tyrant, on the other hand, was bound to be threatened by plots. However, the good king was to be feared, if only by his enemies, and to be '...peaceful to the extent that there was nothing left worth his fighting for.' Thucydides had provided more detail on the tyrant's insecurity, declaring that

'...the tyrant's first thought was always for himself, for his own personal safety...Consequently security was the chief political principal in these governments.'

He contrasted tyranny with the 'established rights and limitations' of hereditary monarchy, although his analysis of why the former tended to replace the latter in post-Trojan War Greece was both cryptic and schematic.¹⁴⁷

Whatever the ethical, philosophical and legal issues, our sources left little doubt about the actual response of Roman emperors to the question of bodyguards. Cassius Dio

¹⁴⁶ Nicocles: Isoc. *Evag.* 43; Antigonos: Plut. *Dem.* 3.3; Aristippus: Plut. *Arat.* 25. 7-26. 4; Nero: Sen. *Clem.* 1. 9. 1-6, 10. 1.

¹⁴⁷ Security: Dio Chyrs. 1. 35. Alexander: *ibid.* 4. 63-65. Tyrant: *ibid.* 3. 59. Fear: *ibid.* 1. 25. Peaceful: *ibid.* 1. 27. Political principle and contrast: Thuc: 1. 17, 13.

made the direct association between Augustus' desire to ensure that his bodyguard was well rewarded and his desire for monarchical power. In the aftermath of the fall of Sejanus, Tacitus had Tiberius make a grim joke of the suggestion that a group of senators be appointed to provide him with armed protection in the curia. Life did not mean so much to him, he was said to have replied, if it had to be protected by arms. Describing the early days of his reign, however, the same historian indicated of Tiberius that '...soldiery accompanied him to the forum, soldiery to the curia'. Cassius Dio also made it clear that Tiberius was well guarded. He conveyed this information within an elaborate charade played out between Emperor and senate; the one simulating confidence, the other flattering concern. The same author credited Claudius with introducing soldiers as guards at dinner parties. Such evidence impelled even Fergus Millar, not renowned for his focus on the role of the Roman military, to conclude, however grudgingly, that:

'No conception of the emperor's relation to his subjects would be complete without taking into account the fact that he was almost always escorted by soldiers'.¹⁴⁸

Beyond the behaviour of individual rulers, Thucydides had supplied arguments against harsh and coercive rule by one state over another. In the debate over Mytilene, Diodotus warned the Athenians that threatening death, never mind carrying out the threat, to the inhabitants of rebel cities would simply make them more likely to revolt and less likely to come to terms; they would feel they had nothing to lose by pursuing a desperate course. In urging merciful rule upon Nero, Seneca painted a detailed and gruesome picture of the counterproductive and dangerous consequences of ruling by fear. In imagery of the vigorous growth of a pruned tree, opposition to a ruler would only increase if it was cut off. Feelings of hopelessness and recklessness bred by extreme fear and oppression risked an explosive reaction, as illustrated by slaves murdering their masters. Lessons of brutality and disloyalty taught by a vicious ruler would not be lost on their subjects, often being reflected in their treatment of him. Although not stated in *De Clementia*, the behaviour and fate of the Emperor Gaius seemed close to the surface in these remarks. Underlining his point and again with the instruction of Nero as one plausible motive, Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* had as its climax

¹⁴⁸ **Augustus:** Cass. Dio 53. 11. 5. **Tiberius:** Tac. *Ann.* 6. 2. 4.; Ibid. 1. 7. 5; Cass. Dio 58. 17. 3-18. 6. **Claudius:** Cass. Dio 60. 3. 3. **Millar:** (1992) p. 61.

the rejection of Claudius by the gods, chiefly because of his judicial killings. Amongst these were enumerated thirty-five senators and three hundred and twenty-one equites.¹⁴⁹

A view from Tacitus of the nature and direction of Imperial terror is provided in a speech of Petillius Cerialis to rebel Gauls. This speech was one of two matched rhetorical addresses, similar in form and some content to his earlier pairing at the Battle of *Mons Graupius*. In the case of Cerialis, the Roman general provided answering points to accusations by the delegates of the Tencteri that Roman rule meant slavery. The speech included an appeal to the provincials based on the idea that whereas they as much as Romans enjoyed the benefits of a good emperor, the oppression of a bad emperor went no wider than his immediate circle. While the SHA noted that Commodus had put to death not only senators and wealthy Roman women, but also that ‘...not a few provincials, for the sake of their riches...were plundered or even slain,’ the fact that this behaviour was recorded by way of illustrating the extremes of that emperor’s behaviour suggested that such widespread terror was rare. Modern scholarship appears divided on the reach of coercion in Roman society. That our ancient literary sources would be largely uninterested in its operation outside the elite is acknowledged, leaving room for the unrecorded suppression of other dissent. Evidence concerning the manpower and capacity of enforcement agencies has been used to support the idea of limited application, although it has also been suggested that such evidence may underestimate the use of magistrates’ slaves and ad hoc militias. Incidental details, although cryptic, may be of relevance here. For example, Appian recorded that during the uncertainties immediately following the assassination of Julius Caesar,

‘Antony ordered the magistrates to have the City watched by night, stationing guards at intervals as in the daytime’.

In a system characterised by potential and actual physical threat, even leniency and restraint could precipitate violence. Vespasian’s refusal to take a full toll of Nero’s informers may well have frustrated the desire for justice/revenge on the part of Helvidius

¹⁴⁹ **Mytilene:** Thuc. 3. 44-46; **Pruning:** Sen. *Clem* 1. 8. 7. **Reaction:** ibid. 1. 12. 4, 1. 13. 1-2. **Counterproductive:** ibid. 1. 26. 1; *Apocol.* 14-15.

Priscus, contributing to the motivation of the latter's provocative opposition. In turn this lead to his execution by the Emperor.¹⁵⁰

It need not surprise us that the elite status of the authors of almost all of our literary sources led them to a preoccupation with the well-being and fate of members of that part of Roman society. However, what may need to be emphasised is the way in which this factor coloured their, and to a large extent our, over-all assessments of individual emperors. More specifically for the present thesis, the ancient handling of evidence in the course of a general characterisation of some emperors as 'bad' and others as 'good' must have obscured the actual level of coercion at any particular time. This will apply whether the focus is on underlying patterns within the Empire or on the behaviour of individual rulers.

Soldiers in the provinces

Our sources outlined the role of the army as an occupying force in the provinces. It may well be correct, guided by Brunt, to doubt MacMullen's assertions about the application of a 'common pattern' in such occupations. For example, the systematic disarmament of conquered peoples seems unlikely to have been a regular practice. However, instances occurred in which such disarmament appeared as an incidental detail to an author's main point, perhaps giving some credibility to the idea of a general pattern. Cicero provided an account of the stern devotion to duty of L. Domitius, who condemned to death a Sicilian shepherd for killing a boar with a hunting spear. Although the man's crime was stated as possessing a weapon in contravention to local edict, the emphasis of the story was on Domitius' behaviour, identifying it as a severe adherence to the law rather than cruelty. Valerius Maximus repeated the story; from his Tiberian perspective, he drew a moral of clearly political resonance:

'...consideration of public authority does not allow us to regard
(Domitius) as too harsh.'

In Augustus' arrangements for the provinces, Cassius Dio had him promise to the senate that by his administration he would 'establish order' and ensure that the areas he controlled were 'pacified'. In the *Res Gestae* Augustus referred at this point to his

¹⁵⁰ **Mons Graupius speeches:** *Agr.* 30-34. **Cerialis:** *Hist.* 4. 74. **Tencteri speech:** *Hist.* 4. 64. **Commodus:** *SHA Comm.* 5. 12-13. **Limited reach of *coercitio*:** Nippel (1995) p. 12-14. **Wider application:** Alston (1996) p. 320; *App. B Civ.* 2. 125. **Helvidius Priscus:** MacMullen (1966) p. 55; *Arr. Epict. diss.* 1. 2. 19-23.

having 'extinguished civil wars'. Tacitus claimed to echo a similar outline to the senate by Tiberius, listing the allocations and tasks of the army. By these arrangements the provinces were to be 'safeguarded'. This process appeared as a mixture of coastline and border protection, for instance in Gaul, and attention to 'recently pacified' areas, such as in Spain. In addition, towns of Roman Italy, such as Puteoli, felt the power of the military. It has been suggested that the location by Nero of veteran colonies in that town and in nearby Capua and Nuceria was impelled by civil unrest.¹⁵¹

In his hymn to Imperial harmony, Aelius Aristides played down the extent of the army's intrusion into the daily lives of the Empire's inhabitants. Dio Chrysostom suggested the image of soldiers as shepherds, faithfully supporting their emperor's care for his sheep. In a similar vein of eulogy, Josephus suggested that its '...perfect discipline makes the army an ornament of peace-time.' Such images of sweetness and light are clearly at odds with those gained from sources more distant from Imperial ideology. The New Testament included advice from John the Baptist to neophyte soldiers, 'No bullying; no blackmail; make do with your pay!' Josephus could give a sense of the military oppression felt by provincials. He had the Herodian king, Agrippa II, attempt to persuade the Jews to abandon hopeless rebellion against Rome. The monarch's method was to outline the thoroughness and ease with which the legions held the various territories of the Empire. In apparent contradiction, but in fact also illustrating the central role of military control in the provinces, Trajan's inability to retain his Eastern conquests may well have been caused by a lack of sufficient manpower to suppress revolts. Nevertheless, as the same emperor earned his title as *Dacicus*, that region had felt the full weight of the Roman military machine, being '...depopulated in the lengthy war with Decebalus.' Less extreme measures, such as the unleashing of troops on city populations, the physical abuse of individuals, and the denial of justice for the victims of soldiers' wrongdoing, can all be widely illustrated.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ **Occupation:** MacMullen (1974) p. 35; Brunt (1975); Cic. *Verr.* 2. 5. 7; Val. Max. 6. 3. 5. **Augustus:** Cass. Dio 53. 13 and RG 34. **Tiberius:** Tac. *Ann.* 4. 4. 3. **Nero and the senate:** *Ann.* 16. 27. **Puteoli:** *Ann.* 13. 48. **Colonies:** Wiedemann (1996) p. 246.

¹⁵² **Soldiers as shepherds or oppressors:** Aristid. *Or.* 26. 67 '...many provincials do not know where their garrison is.'; Dio Chrys. 1. 28; Joseph. *BJ* 3. 105; Luke 3. 14; Joseph. *BJ* 2. 366-383. **Trajan's difficulties:** Cass. Dio 68. 29. 4; Mattern p. 103-104. **Dacia:** Eutropius 8.6; Bennett p. 101. **Soldiers' violence on civilians:** Isaac (2002) p. 182-190; Lib. *Or.* 47. 33.

The question arises as to whether oppressive behaviour on the part of troops was a symptom of weak civil administration or was a deliberate policy to coerce the population at large. Supporting the former could be cited the apparently low number of civilian Imperial officials. Based on the *Notitia Dignitatum* and other sources, it has been suggested that the manpower of the Imperial civil administration, estimated at its probable maximum in the fifth and sixth centuries CE, may have been below 31,000. It is intriguing that a broad comparison indicates that administration of the Chinese Empire of the twelfth century CE involved a workforce of officials perhaps twenty-five times greater. Although any such calculations must be highly speculative, where they have been attempted the results consistently identify the involvement of a relatively small number of civilian officials in running the Roman Empire. For example, it has been estimated that in 249 CE there were perhaps only one hundred and eighty non-senatorial high-ranking administrators in the whole of the Empire. In relation to sociological studies of different types of regime, it is worthy of note that Imperial Rome has been '...widely held to be the antithesis of Weber's bureaucratic style of government'; that is, one characterised by large numbers of officials administering complex and exclusive procedures. It may also be legitimate to interpret evidence of the limited impact of Roman government on provincials as bringing into higher relief our sources' relatively few examples of the involvement of troops. In the context of a close study of surviving Egyptian documentation it has certainly been concluded that

'...Roman provincial administration was actually government by an army of occupation,'

Also in an eastern context, evidence has been cited of the army's role in maintaining communal order and in enforcing the will of the central authority. Blurred distinctions between the military and civil records have been interpreted as indicating soldiers' central role. Arguments that the army played a limited role in the enforcement of Roman political will have been based on 'the comparatively small size' of military forces in the Empire. However, this view seems to overlook the extent to which troops were embedded within their localities and the variation in geographic distribution of these soldiers. The question must also arise as to what would constitute 'big' or 'small' troop deployments in the particular circumstances of Roman rule. Ancient evidence does seem to imply that soldiers were a significant element in the lives of provincials, whether perceived as a positive or negative factor. Tacitus made this clear in comments

about soldiers' presence in both eastern and western provinces. In the latter case he went so far as to say:

'The provincials were accustomed to the soldiers' company and liked to have them quartered there, and many were bound to them by ties of intimacy and kinship'.

While on the march, soldiers could certainly cause problems. The disruption might even be highlighted in its absence. Thus, the good behaviour of Severus Alexander's army en route to Parthia was emphasised by the author of the SHA's remark that '...you would have said that senators, not soldiers, were passing that way.' The potential complexity of the legions' relationship with the locality of its postings was exemplified by accounts from Syria. There incidents were reported in which villages near Antioch made use of friendly Roman soldiers to intimidate rival villages and to drive off tax collectors. On the other hand, straightforward warnings such as that of Plutarch about '...the boots of Roman soldiers just above your head' have the ring of authentic experience. The integration of administrative and coercive roles within the Roman military has been emphasised in comparative sociological studies of state power. In fact the extent to which magistrates' powers were associated with military affairs has been described as '...a characteristic of the Roman polity unknown to any other people'.¹⁵³

Soldiers in the city of Rome

The traditional Roman constitution, represented as that devised by Servius Tullius, the sixth of the seven mythic kings, did not allow armed soldiers inside the *pomerium*, the religiously defined edge of the City. The 'tribal assembly', at which the population met to decide non-military matters, was convened within the limits of the City; the 'centuriate assembly', which represented the population gathered in military units, took place on the Campus Martius beyond the *pomerium*. A military commander had to relinquish that authority before crossing the sacred boundary. These restrictions and ancient legal stipulations help to cultivate an image of the City of Rome as haven of civil

¹⁵³ **Weak administration or policy:** Campbell (1984) p. 253-25. **Civil officials:** Jones, A. H. M. (1964) p. 1057, 1411 n. 44. **China:** Hopkins (1980) p. 121. **Administration in 249 CE:** Heather p. 190. **Bureaucratic style:** Woolf p. 891-892. **Troop involvement:** Lendon (1997) p. 2. **Egypt:** Fink p. 1. **Eastern evidence:** Pollard (1996) p. 214; Isaac (1992) p. 112-113, 115-118. **Size of military presence:** Maier p. 710-712; Pollard (2000) p. 2. **Local ties:** Tac. *Ann.* 13. 35. 1. **On the march:** SHA *Alex. Sev.* 50. 1-2. **Complex relationship:** *Hist.* 2. 80; Pollard (2000) p. 89-90; Plut. *Prae. Ger. Reip.* 815E. **Integration of roles:** Weber (1968) p. 970-971.

proprieties, an inviolable centre of majestic peace from which the provinces were governed. In the Imperial period this impression was strengthened by images of the armies operating in the provinces as a ring of steel to guard the City, effectively unprotected by walls, as it was until the late third century CE. Clearly, this portrayal of Rome was defaced many times by the force of arms, usually in civil wars. However, even outside such exceptional events, a picture of Rome as an essentially demilitarised zone could not be further from the truth. In fact, the routine military presence was greater there than in any other city, larger even in terms of numbers than in the normal complement of any single military camp. Precision about the military presence within Rome is made difficult by uncertainties about the city's population and the perennial problem of distinguishing between the paper and actual numerical strength of all units of the Roman army. Focussing on the early principate, Griffin took a wide view of the manpower available to enforce the will of the authorities. She included the *cohortes vigilum, urbanae* and *Praetoriani*, and produced the perhaps surprisingly large estimate of one such officer for every fifty to one hundred inhabitants. The statistic is perhaps easier to accept when it is noted that the *vigiles*, whose normally accepted role was that of fire fighters, were not only organised on military lines (like their modern counterparts), but carried weapons and possessed legionary style standards. In a more detailed, archaeologically based study, Coulston suggested a somewhat lower proportion of military personnel to the Augustan civilian population, but one that rose steadily throughout the early Empire, reaching a maximum of one to forty-five or perhaps even twenty-five under Septimius Severus. During the Imperial period, the topographical distribution of military units in Rome showed elements of both sensitivity to the appearance of tyrannical force and awareness of the practicalities of population control. Thus, while the Praetorians were garrisoned in their camp at a respectful distance from the City proper, and efforts were made to place non Italian troops on the outskirts, cavalry units were stationed closer to the Imperial residences.¹⁵⁴

Within the city of Rome this muscle was not infrequently used, even, for example by Nero, to intimidate the senate. Did such intervention constitute the maintenance of order amongst a volatile population or could it be indicative of more general political

¹⁵⁴ **Pomerium:** Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7. 59. 3; Beard, North and Price p. 179; Brand p. 11. **Inviolable Rome:** Aristid. *Or.* 26. 84. **Military presence:** Griffin (1991) p. 40; Coulston p. 76-81. **Vigiles:** Dig. 37. 13. 1; Coulston p. 89. **Placement of camps:** Coulston p. 82-86. **Praetorians:** see pages 137-138.

repression? Differing circumstances may suggest one explanation rather than the other. However, it must be relevant to comment that the nature of our evidence and the portrayed outlook of our sources both tend towards an unsympathetic view of the populace, particularly whenever they were involved in mass action outside official control. Nevertheless, there was a long tradition in Rome of elite sensitivity to the possibility of plots and disorder among the populace. Such fears were manifested, for example, in a distrust of nocturnal gatherings. This could be retrojected to the earliest period of the Republic, playing a role in secret plans to restore the kings. Sallust had Catiline meet with his co-conspirators 'at dead of night'.¹⁵⁵

It has been argued that the senate and consuls of the Republic had neither sufficient political authority nor the available manpower to engineer the permanent repression of the Roman populace. When our sources reported the adoption of oppressive measures it was invariably in the context of a 'crisis'. Even then it appeared necessary for the authorities to be confident of the support of a significant proportion of that populace. Thus it was the recourse to armed insurrection in 122 BCE by C. Sempronius Gracchus that brought about in response the *senatus consultum ultimum*, authorising the relevant senior magistrates to use what physical force they deemed necessary to restore the security of the State. It was notable that, in that first instance, use was made of Cretan archers, who just happened to be there at the time. However, in considering such evidence, the outlook and biases of our literary sources must be brought into focus. The instances they reported of military and other coercive forces being used in the course of Republican political conflict shared a common feature; that being the existence of a claimed challenge to the established political order perceived to be of sufficient seriousness to threaten its stability. Although an examination of those sources has identified forty-six such occasions between 287 and 44 BCE, like many such calculations, it leaves open the question of whether this was a significantly large or small number! Nevertheless, it must be reasonable to maintain that the adherence of ancient authors to that established order made it unlikely that they would express an interest in any routine coercive measures employed by the regime. Such elements would be viewed

¹⁵⁵ Nero: Tac. Ann. 16. 27. Kings: Livy 2. 3. 7. Sallust: Cat. 27.

as part of the normal political scene and therefore beneath the horizon of interest among the authors and their readers.¹⁵⁶

Roman historians had less reason than their Greek counterparts to devote their energies to explaining the workings of the City's political system. Authors from both traditions shared a perspective that concentrated on the behaviour of individuals to explain historical events, in fact as often as not reversing this process and using historical exempla for the purpose of demonstrating the ethical values of individuals and their actions. However, Greek historians from Herodotus onwards represented at least in part a tradition of general enquiry and philosophical debate. Not only were these features either weak or altogether lacking in their Roman counterparts, the Latin authors had the further limiting characteristic that they were writing for other Romans, rather than for Greeks in a wide variety of city and other cultural contexts. They were therefore likely to take for granted rather than explain the normal state of affairs. Illustrating the point in another area of study, that of religion, Herodian gave as his reason for digressing on the Romans' dedication to Cybele that 'it is unknown to some of the Greeks'. He used a similar explanation for detailing the Romans' deification of their emperors. Tending towards the same result (our relative ignorance of the details of what was typical in the political landscape of Rome) was ancient authors' concentration on what they saw as being unusual or innovative, or the inclusion of everyday political information only as circumstantial detail. Thus, Tacitus provided the first record of troops keeping order at the theatre and games as a detail incidental to material depicting differences in character between Drusus and his father, Tiberius. Tacitus also recorded the removal of these guards by Nero as a measure to obtain popular approval and their later reinstatement by the same emperor in order to ensure a reliable clique for his own performances.¹⁵⁷

It cannot be surprising, therefore, that our sources seldom indicated that the use of coercion in defence of the established order went beyond the repertoire of measures open to the political authorities (assembly, senate and magistrates) acting in properly constituted form. It could be argued that individuals were justified in taking, and

¹⁵⁶ **Repression only in crisis:** Nippel (1995) p. 57ff; Lintott (1968/1999) p. 89-92. **Cretan archers:** Plut. *C. Gracchus* 16. 3-4. **Outbreaks of political violence:** Lintott (1968/1999) p. 209-216. **Limitations of our sources:** Mann, M. (1986) p. 262.

¹⁵⁷ **Roman and Greek historians:** Wiedemann (2000) p. 523; Herodian 1. 11. 1, 4. 2. 1. **Theatre guards:** *Ann.* 1. 77. 1, 13. 24. 1, 14. 15. 4; Nippel (1995) p. 93-94; Griffin (1996) p. 111.

possibly actually under a duty to take, any actions they felt to be appropriate if they perceived the state to be under threat. For example, in 133 BCE the consul, P. Mucius Scaevola, declined to take direct action against T. Sempronius Gracchus. In response the pontifex maximus, P. Cornelius Scipio Nasica, used his own initiative to lead an ad hoc group of senators and their followers to defeat the rebellion. He made no pretence at doing so as the representative of some official or unofficial group. Rather he backed his own judgement about the threat to the *res publica*. Another story attached to the same Nasica confirmed the point. In 138 BCE he had opposed a tribune's dubiously legal attempt to fix the price of grain, commanding others to listen to his arguments on the explicitly stated basis that "I know best". The importance of this precedent was predictably emphasised by Cicero in relation to his similarly independent actions in 63 BCE. In another example, the consul, C. Claudius Marcellus, proposed to divert forces against the supposed approach to Rome of Julius Caesar in 49 BCE. Against strong opposition in the prevailing atmosphere of dissention, he declared that,

"If I am prevented by the vote of the senate from taking steps for the public safety, I will take such steps on my own responsibility as consul."¹⁵⁸

Sulla's military occupation of Rome in 88 BCE could be portrayed as being in the public interest, as opposed to being motivated by personal ambition, fear or the desire for revenge. However, ancient and modern commentators have suggested that the circumstances surrounding this radical act formed a watershed in the growing use of military force in Roman politics. Plutarch made the latter point, but in terms of his analysis of individual human behaviour rather than social change or the development of political systems. He used the event to rehearse the general question of whether the accompanying cruel and violent behaviour was an inevitable product of the acquisition of supreme power or whether the attainment of such a position merely unleashed otherwise latent tendencies in certain people. It is interesting that Plutarch here provided another example of the ancient focus on individual psychology to explain what modern analysis might view as a feature of wider political or social activity. Whether or not either of Plutarch's alternative explanations might more nearly approach the truth, our evidence indicated the onset of a period in which troops and other force were now

¹⁵⁸ **Individual initiative:** Nippel (1995) p. 63. **Nasica:** Wiedemann (2000) p. 517; Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 19; Val. Max. 3.7.3. **Cicero:** *Tusc.* 4. 51. **Claudius Marcellus:** App. *B Civ.* 2. 31.

regularly and openly used to gain or defend power in Rome. According to the standard tradition, this era of the rule of force and coercion came to an end in 28/27 BCE.¹⁵⁹

Our sources seldom focused on this evidence in the context of routine political repression. However, it is possible to demonstrate an undercurrent of the established order's perception that the Roman populace could form a threat to stability. Fear of plebeian mobilisation in favour of the imprisoned Catilinarians was strong enough to bring equites and citizen volunteers to the defence of the Capitol in 63 BCE. It also contributed to the decision to carry out summary executions of the conspirators. In the 50s BCE P. Clodius Pulcher obtained political power by championing causes favoured by the plebs, including in 58 BCE the first *lex frumentaria* establishing a free corn dole. His activities have been described as being an innovative attempt to forge the urban mob into a distinct political constituency. In an atmosphere characterised in our sources as one of communal and mob violence, the supporters of Clodius were opposed by those of Milo, neither man operating within the constraints of standard magisterial powers. Freedmen, slaves and hired gladiators were all used in these disturbances. Something of a climax was reached with the plebs' burning of the Curia after their patron's murder in 52 BCE. In response Pompey was empowered by the senate to levy troops in Italy and to use them against the populace of Rome. As pointed out by Nippel, the shock value of these events portrayed by our sources should not distract our attention from their reality as an extension of the use of violence in political dialogue. A major element of this increased violence was the established authority's willingness to employ military repression.¹⁶⁰

A feature of Clodius' activities had been his use of the *collegia*. The origins of these associations were probably lost even to the Romans of the late Republic, although they were later recorded as being referred to in the Twelve Tables. In their most official manifestation *collegia* appeared as groupings of the major priesthoods. Plutarch's allocation of this phenomenon to the time of the second king of Rome, while presumably not historical, nevertheless underlined the importance of *collegia* to Roman tradition and

¹⁵⁹ **Public interest:** App. *B. Civ.* 1. 57; Crawford p. 146-147. **Watershed:** ibid. 1. 60; Plut. *Sull.* 30. 5; Nippel (1995) p. 66.

¹⁶⁰ **Catiline:** Nippel (1995) p. 67-68; Cic. *Att.* 2. 1. 7; Cic. *Sest.* 28. **Clodius and Milo:** Cassius Dio 39. 8. 1; Cic. *Att.* 4. 3; Plut. *Brut.* 20. 4; Lintott (1968) p. 195; Nippel p. 78-79. **Pompey:** Cass. Dio 40. 53. **Increased violence:** Nippel p. 83.

identity. However, it is as that rare phenomenon in Roman social panorama, an organised manifestation of plebeian collectivity, that they are of particular interest here. As such, *collegia* appeared to have functioned broadly as mutual aid societies based around the often overlapping features of religious cult, locality and occupation. Much of our information about *collegia* has been derived from inscriptions and from legal codifications, a fact underlining their remoteness from ancient historians' interest in high politics. These sources have confirmed the role of *collegia* in supervising cult, arranging festive dinners and as burial clubs; membership involved fees that ensured some respectability. An inscription from Lanuvium, dated 136 CE, provided much information about the conduct of such an organisation, indicating the mixed slave and free membership. Its specificity about penalties for unruly activity at meetings may, of course, be interpreted either as evidence for the orderly intent of the group or for the need to control manifestly unacceptable behaviour. Their popularity is undeniable, as chronicled in the comprehensive documentation by Waltzing. Varro, writing in 37 BCE, described

‘...the club dinners which are now so countless that they make the price of provisions go soaring.’

The *collegia*'s political potency (real or imagined) was demonstrable through their association with a cult of the dead Gracchi and their banning by the senate in 64 BCE. Clodius had acted to bring about their reinstatement as legal organisations and to strengthen their role within the *vici*. He attempted unsuccessfully to enhance their role in the distribution of his recently established corn dole. Among the extensive measures taken by Julius Caesar to restore order and prosperity to the City of Rome was the dissolution of all *collegia* ‘...apart from those of ancient foundation.’ The exception made for long-established organisations again suggests a perception that their more recent political activity had been unacceptable. Despite his efforts at regulation, plebeian unrest during the Dictator's own funeral in 44 BCE was seen to be connected with the *collegia*. This negative view of the *collegia* could hardly be better summed up than by Cicero's comment that they were formed from the ‘slave-dregs of the City’.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ **Collegia:** Lintott (1999) p. 177-178; Plut. *Num.* 17. 1; Nippel (1995) p. 70-75; Dig. 47. 22. **Nature:** Garnsey and Saller 156-158; Lintott (1968) p. 78-83. **Inscriptions:** Waltzing Vol. 1 p. 3-4; Hopkins (1983) p. 211-217. **Popularity:** Varro *Rust.* 3. 2. 16. **Political threat:** Plut. *C. Gracch* 18. 2; Nippel (1995) p. 71-72; Cass. Dio 40. 49. 2-3. **Corn dole:** Nippel (1995) p. 76. **Julius Caesar:** Suet. *Iul.* 41-42. **Funeral:** Val. Max. 9. 15. 1. **Negative view:** Cic. *Pis.* 9; Purcell p. 801.

On the basis of this history, it cannot be surprising that Augustus brought about profound changes in this aspect of Roman life. Equally, it must be plausible to argue from the fundamental nature of these changes to a perception of the continuing political relevance of the plebeians in general and the *collegia* in particular. The first *princeps* placed generosity to the Roman plebs alongside his other self-advertised achievements. Beyond his physical transformation of their City, Augustus radically overhauled the organisation of its administrative divisions. He apportioned the City into *regiones* and within these, smaller *vici*. Designated magistrates and other officials were appointed to oversee individual areas and to be responsible for 'night watches and guards', ostensibly with the task of protecting against fires, although the military nature of these *vigiles* has been discussed (page 129). This organisation was said to be still in operation in the early third century. Significantly, the process involved control of the *collegia* and their absorption into Rome's regular administrative and ideological structure. The first of these aims was accomplished by a *Lex Julia*, possibly of 7 CE, requiring official sanction before a *collegium* could be established. The second aim was achieved in no small part by the transformation of the locally based *Compitalia* festival. This measure was taken in 7 BCE, as part of a reorganisation of the City. Originating, as the name suggests, in rites in honour of the *Lares* at crossroads, the responsible *collegia* were harnessed to transform them into a religious celebration of Augustus and his family. Clearly reflecting a desired political effect, these changes '...symbolised the fact that Augustan order had come to the city itself'. Restored by Gaius in a populist frame of mind, the *collegia* were again banned by Claudius in 41 CE. It is indicative of the perceived role of these organisations that Cassius Dio's account of their renewed suppression is provided in the context of moves against meetings by Jews and even the closing down of taverns; all were associated with fears of the population gathering for seditious purposes. It is also suggestive of the continued significance of *collegia* that Elagabalus and Severus Alexander were still tinkering with their organisation in relation to the general administration of the City of Rome. The potentially dissident nature of these plebeian organisations was confirmed by references in the law codes. The punishment for setting up an unauthorised *collegium* was to be equivalent to that of someone 'occupying public places or temples with armed men'.¹⁶²

¹⁶² **Generosity:** RG 15. **Reorganisation:** Suet. *Aug.* 30; Cass. Dio 55.8; OCD3 p. 352-353. **Official sanction:** Dig. 47. 22. 3. 1. **Compitalia:** Beard, North and Price p. 184-185; Nippel (1995) p. 72-73, 86;

With or without the continued role of the *collegia*, incidents of urban unrest in Rome continued to be recorded. In the context of his account of Gaius' tyranny, even Cassius Dio could show an understanding of the inequality of power in Rome and a sympathetic awareness of the imbalance of coercive ability on which it relied. He described the general situation as being

'...an angry ruler on one side, and a hostile people on the other...The contest between them, however, was not an equal one; for the people could do nothing but talk and show something of their feelings by their gestures, whereas Gaius would destroy his opponents...'

Specifically, Cassius Dio depicted an occasion on which the populace assembled in the Circus Maximus in order to protest against Gaius' tax demands. The demonstration was suppressed by ruthless force as the Emperor '...had them slain by the soldiers; after this all kept quiet'. In 61 CE '...the multitude which clustered round and menaced with rocks and torches' initially prevented the mass execution of 400 household slaves of a City Prefect, Pedanius Secundus, sensationally murdered by one of their number. We are informed that this outburst represented a clash between a traditionally harsh law and the plebs' perception of natural justice. It is instructive that during the senate's debate on the matter, the call for the enactment of the full rigour of the law was argued on the basis that it was only the fear of such severity that enabled 'individuals', (that is, members of the elite Roman families), to live safely among a much larger slave and general population. The form of the official response to the protests, although sketched in a sentence, may be seen to indicate a number of significant features:

'Thereupon Caesar berated the people in an edict and lined with military detachments the entire route along which the condemned were to be lead to punishment.'

Nero's personal involvement presumably demonstrated the importance of the issue and was perhaps required for a large-scale troop deployment within the city, thus underlining the attachment of the soldiers to his person. The fact that an edict was read as a prelude to the military deployment suggests that such a response by the authorities was part of a known legal process rather than an ad hoc reaction. Finally the effectiveness of the

Liebeschuetz p. 70-71. **Gaius/Claudius:** Cass. Dio 60. 6. 6-7. **Elagabalus/Severus Alexander:** SHA *Heliogab.* 20. 3; *ibid.* *Alex. Sev.* 33. 2. **Punishment:** Dig. 47. 22. 2.

repressive measure is suggested by the fact that its description formed the conclusion to the main part of a lengthy account of this incident.¹⁶³

The Praetorians

The ability of the *princeps* to exercise legalised military control within the city of Rome had been an important part of Augustus' careful shaping of his powers. In particular, an element of the arrangements made in 23 BCE gave him the right to retain proconsular authority inside the *pomerium*. By this measure a repeat of military occupation, such as Sulla had imposed in 88 BCE, could have been legal. On a smaller scale, the predilection of subsequent *principes* for soldiers as bodyguards was predictably viewed by Tacitus as 'the reality of Imperial power.' However, it had been normal for military leaders of the Republic to be allocated escorts of soldiers. These took their name, *cohors praetoria*, from the commander's tent, the *praetorium*. Faction leaders of the first century BCE civil wars retained large bodies of personal troops and Augustus introduced Rome to the permanence of military occupation by stationing nine cohorts (4,500 or perhaps 9,000 men) in and around the city. Tiberius concentrated this force in the Praetorian camp on the north-eastern edge of Rome, leading Tacitus to comment that '...the City was occupied by its own troops'. Suetonius recorded that this was part of a more general garrisoning of Italy

'...for the purposes of securing relief from bandits and robbers, as well as from lawless rebellions'.

Juvenal associated these troops with murderous repression and insecurity during the period of Sejanus' power. Tacitus was more explicit still, claiming that the massing of the Praetorians was intended to bring about '...a rise in their own confidence and in others' dread'; or, as the Penguin translation puts it, to 'intimidate the population'. Cassius Dio provided an unambiguous example of this role of the Praetorians. Tiberius was said to have drilled his guards in front of the senators

'...as if they were ignorant of the power of these troops; his purpose was to make them more afraid of him, when they saw his defenders to be so numerous and so strong.'

In spite of the link with Sejanus, it is later stressed that control of these troops is exclusively in the hands of the emperor. Tacitus provided an instance of Tiberius

¹⁶³ **Gaius:** Cass. Dio 59. 13. 4, 28. 11. **Slave executions:** Tacitus *Ann.* 14. 42-45.

angrily demanding why a sycophantic senator was involving himself in a question about their privileges (see page 266). In confirmation of this sentiment the superior status, pay and conditions of the Praetorians reflected their role as guarding the person of the emperor, while the diplomas granting them the privileges due after they had completed a specified number of years' service were signed by the emperor rather than by the prefect directly in command of the unit.¹⁶⁴

Coercion depicted in satire

Although in satire we certainly have a different reflection of Roman culture and society, the distortions and uncertainties of the glimpses permitted are no less problematic than those of history. Authors such as Lucilius, Horace and Juvenal, while lacking the political careers of a Tacitus or a Cassius Dio, were nevertheless either themselves members of the privileged elite or had powerful friends. More directly, one of the clearest elements in the far from clear definition of Roman satire must be the varied and often uncertain personas adopted by the writers. These were unpredictably any or some of

‘...civic watchdog, sneering cynic, mocking or indignant observer, and social outcast.’

Thus the task of extracting genuine political or social comment from the genre is difficult at best, fruitless at worst. It must be assumed that authors' personal and indeed political ties may undermine any claimed ‘...ideal of unequivocal freedom of speech’. Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to hope that the general shape of incident and detail, if not its vibrant colour, intensity and absurdity, was based to some extent on real experience.¹⁶⁵

Assuming this to be the case, Juvenal reflected a sullen resentment of the position and behaviour of soldiers. Perhaps responding to specific measures taken by Hadrian to enhance the status of legionary service, the unfinished sixteenth satire complained about soldiers' rights regarding wills and appearance in legal proceedings. He even bemoaned the impossibility of a private citizen obtaining legal redress for an assault by a soldier.

¹⁶⁴ **Proconsular power** : Cassius Dio 53. 32; Nippel (1995) p. 91. **Bodyguards**: *Hist.* 4. 11. 1; as a sign of tyranny, see pages.122-123. **Praetorians**: OCD3 p. 1241; Keppie p. 384-387; Suet. *Aug.* 49; *Tib.* 37; **Sejanus**: Tac. *Ann.* 4. 2. 1; Juv. 10. 94-98; **Drill**: Cass. Dio 57. 24. 5. **Privileges**: Tac. *Ann.* 6. 3. 1; Campbell (1984) p. 111.

¹⁶⁵ **Nature of satire**: OCD3 p. 1358; Braund, (S. H.) p. 2; Morgan p. 4.

One of the misadventures of Petronius' hero, Encolpius, was to be carrying a sword when he bumped into a soldier. Even though the account suggested that the soldier was in fact 'a deserter or a thug' (satirical pique?), the authority of the military man over the civilian was clearly portrayed as the former confiscated the weapon. This incidental detail adds to the evidence about the state's monopoly of the means of coercion (see pages 33 and 125). Apuleius invented a complicated account of an encounter between a vegetable grower and a soldier. The soldier, apparently able to converse in both Latin and Greek, demanded the use of the farmer's ass to transport his officer's equipment. Although the civilian responded to being struck by beating up the soldier and then hiding, the military man involved his colleagues and reported the matter to the civil authorities. The soldiers, impressing the magistrate by oaths involving the emperor, eventually succeeded in having the vegetable grower arrested and possibly executed. Having gained possession of the ass, the soldier was described as arranging its load of weapons 'in a striking manner' (*conspicuam*),

'...not because such was the rule of arms, but to the end he might make fear those which passed by'.¹⁶⁶

Democratic violence

Of course, there is no suggestion in this assemblage of evidence that physical coercion and terror were the sole preserves of regimes that could be designated as personal tyrannies or monarchies. Thucydides recorded the use of physical force and security measures beyond the rule of single tyrants. He noted the role of the 'one hundred and twenty Hellenic youths' in carrying out the 'rough work' of Athens' Four Hundred in 411 BCE. At an earlier stage, shortly after the launch of the Sicilian expedition, the Athenian democracy itself had become 'inflamed' by suspected sacrilege; '...every day showed an increase in savagery and led to more arrests being made.' Thucydides perhaps transmitted to Aristotle this view of the coercive nature of the more extreme manifestations of democracy. The latter saw the brutal Athenian regime of the Thirty as a result of the irresponsible actions of the *demos*. Violence in the more democratic elements of politics in Republican Rome could be played down, for example by Appian. He presumably wished to highlight the contrast between his descriptions of civil conflict

¹⁶⁶ **Wills and justice:** Juv. 16. 25, 53-55. **Legal proceedings:** ibid. 13-17; Campbell (1984) p. 231-236, 257. **Assault:** ibid. 7-12. **Sword:** Petron. *Sat.* 82. **Soldier and vegetable grower:** Apul. *Met.* 9. 39-42 and 10. 1; see Mitchell p. 114-115 for evidence of the military commandeering and misusing transport.

in the first century BCE and an earlier era of supposed restraint. Admittedly within the period leading to the disorder of civil war, even Appian described violence in the workings of Rome's legislative assemblies.¹⁶⁷

The place of coercion in modern analyses of emperors' authority

Modern analyses of Roman ideology usually acknowledge the role of military force and physical coercion in establishing the emperor's authority. However, they generally leave the area only partially explored. I suspect that this is because it is deemed to be less interesting than other aspects of ideology. Momigliano broadly confirmed such a view in his study of the Greek and Roman historiography of warfare. Although he singled out as exceptions the accounts of civil wars by Thucydides, Sallust and Tacitus, he suggested that modern writers generally follow their ancient counterparts in viewing wars as inevitable (and therefore uninteresting), while politics is seen as reflecting individual character and choice (and is therefore more attractive as a subject). In the course of introducing his masterly exploration of Augustus' use of visual images, Zanker included the brief statement that, 'Augustus's imagery would have been useless without his legions and enormous resources.' As he continued, the importance of military imagery was of course explored in some depth alongside religious, dynastic and other forms. However, it was examined exclusively as an ideology of power and conquest that eventually

'...perpetuated itself and transcended the realities of everyday life to project onto future generations the impression that they lived in the best of all possible worlds in the best of all times.'

Zanker suggested that early busts of Octavian portraying an '...ambitious and power-hungry young man' (**Plate 11 i**) would '...appeal (in a positive sense) to the masses' rather than represent the negative face of coercion.¹⁶⁸

Without necessarily challenging the drift of Zanker's general analysis of the workings of imagery, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that among the 'realities of everyday life' that impinged on the ruled could have been uncomfortable perceptions of intimidatory and coercive aspects of military power. Zanker gave no space to such

¹⁶⁷ **Hellenic youths:** 8. 69. **Democratic savagery:** 6. 60. **The Thirty:** Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 34-35; Sogno p. 342-343. **Roman politics:** App. *B Civ.* 1. 1-5, 1. 30-33.

¹⁶⁸ **Modern interest:** Ando (p. 26) says this more or less directly. **War/politics:** Momigliano p. 120-124; Campbell (2002b) p. 1-2. **Augustan imagery:** Zanker (1988) p. 3-4, 41-42.

considerations. In this respect, he was supported by at least one major reviewer, and it has to be admitted that he seems to be in good company. According to Tacitus, and followed by Syme, opposition to Augustus had ceased to exist and he was 'without a single adversary' once he was firmly in control. Again largely following Tacitus, reasons to explain this state of affairs may be seen to include: the heavy toll of the civil war period on the political elite; from that same period, a weariness of conflict and a perception that the previous system of government was not working; and the skilfully managed ambiguity of Augustus' constitutional position - although clearly sole ruler, nevertheless retaining enough Republican form to avoid the fate of Julius Caesar. However, neither Tacitus nor Syme made any attempt to hide the violence and intimidation by which Octavian had come to exercise power. Reflecting the era of his analysis, Syme could even characterise the long reach of 'judicial murders' and proscriptions involved in this process 'to resemble a class-war.' Evidence to support the imposition of authority by the use of force can be found in Appian. He provided a particularly graphic account of the use of the military to suppress political demonstration in the Rome of the Triumvirs. It should also be added that despite suggesting a lack of opposition to Augustus, Tacitus had even the reportedly positive commentators on the rule of the *princeps* indicate that '...just a few things had been handled by force to ensure peace for the rest.' Perhaps more significantly for a thesis wishing to bring into sharper focus the coercive aspects of Roman Imperial rule, his account of Augustus' funeral must weigh against any general picture of authority free of such features. Having published an edict warning the population against any repeat of the disturbances that had accompanied the funeral of Julius Caesar, Tiberius ensured that:

'On the day of the funeral soldiers stood as if forming a garrison, much to the derision of...(onlookers who)...said, an elderly *princeps*, after a powerfulness lasting so long and having even provided resources for the state in the form of heirs, would evidently require protecting by military assistance to ensure a peaceful burial.'¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ **Review of Zanker:** Wallace-Hadrill (1989b) p. 154. **No opposition:** *Ann.* 1. 2; Syme (1939) p. 372, 479. **Reasons for the lack of opposition:** *Ann.* 1. 2; Raaflaub and Samons p. 451-454. **Violence of Octavian's rise to power:** *Ann.* 1. 10; Syme (1939) p. 187ff; App. *B.Civ* 5. 67. **Class war:** Syme (1939) p. 193. **Minimum use of force:** *Ann.* 1. 9. **Funeral:** *Ann.* 1. 8. Although Cassius Dio's initial account of the funeral suggested that the involvement of troops was ceremonial (56. 42. 2), Tiberius' fears of disorder emerged later (57. 2. 2).

It may be significant that this passage was not discussed by Syme in either his *Roman Revolution* or *Tacitus*. It has been noted that Syme gave little attention to the military in his analysis of Augustan Rome. He did consider the various plots against Augustus. On these, he reflected the view of Cassius Dio about the difficulty of obtaining reliable information. His general conclusion, as evidenced by Suetonius and shared by Raaflaub and Samons, was that the threat posed by conspiracies against Augustus was probably at the same time both small and exaggerated by the regime. However, as suggested by Tacitus' account of the first *princeps*' funeral, this assessment may not necessarily imply a lack of military controls; it may even be evidence for their general effectiveness. Nevertheless, if only in acknowledgement of the general drift of modern scholarship, this might be an appropriate juncture at which to give specific attention to factors other than coercion that could be said to form a foundation for the authority of Roman emperors.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Syme and the military: Linderski p. 46. Plots - lack of information: Syme (1939) p. 479; Cass. Dio 53. 19. Small and/or exaggerated threat: Syme (1939) p. 479; Suet. *Aug.* 19. 1; Raaflaub and Samons p. 432.

6. Bases of power other than coercion

Introduction

It is not the contention of this thesis that coercion was the sole basis upon which Roman emperors ruled. It has indeed been argued that physical force and the power of the military were central to authority in Rome; also that they were recognisably integral parts of the political culture, in spite of the distaste for this reality expressed in our elite literary sources. However, it will be of value to place the coercive and military features of authority in the wider context of those characteristics that delineated the social power of the emperors. For the purposes of this thesis, such a process will have particular explanatory utility where it appears that other features in fact revealed a coercive and military underpinning. Therefore, prior to a concentration on the characteristics of Roman emperors that will emphasise a personal relationship with their soldiers, a survey will be made of other general factors that have been associated with their authority. These will include some detail on law, religion, and art, symbol and ceremony, alongside brief allusion to other factors.

Law

No doubt speaking with the prejudice of a lawyer, Cicero declared that nothing more pleased

‘...that supreme God...than the assemblies and gatherings of men associated with justice, which are called states.’

In an echo of Cicero, Gibbon drew a distinction between the Roman Empire of Trajan and the Antonines on the one hand, and the territories of later and earlier conquerors on the other. The former, he claimed, were ‘united by laws’. This perspective appears to privilege law as a defining element of organised states. From a modern perspective it is not so easy to be sure about the role of law as a basis for political authority in Greek and Roman society. ‘Law, the king of all, men and gods alike,’ proclaimed Plato’s Callicles, alluding to an apparently similar statement by Pindar. In his fable of the hawk and nightingale, Hesiod put forward ‘straight judgements’ and ‘justice’ as the bases of relationships, and as features that distinguished men from wild animals. Ancient authors sang the praises of law and justice, particularly as facets of the behaviour of rulers and of government in general. Herodotus’ fanciful account of Mycerinus had the Egyptians praise him more than any other pharaoh because of the

equity of his dealings, while the Athenians of the late sixth century BCE were said to have gone from 'strength to strength' after replacing rule by tyrants with equality before the law. However, these and other examples of the status of law are problematic. The meaning of Pindar's praise for law/custom in his fragmentary poem is far from clear. The interpretation put upon it in the Platonic dialogue, essentially that might is right, is possibly incorrect. Nevertheless, while Herakles' theft of the cattle of Geryon may well have been the act of a demigod and a character that was 'the touchstone of excellence', it was still murderous robbery by the archetype of strength and power. Mycerinus' justice did not save him from the wrath of the gods and the literary context of Herodotus' tribute to the Athenians was their ultimately disastrous conflict with Sparta.¹⁷¹

For any expressed view that rulers were in some way subject to external laws, others bring the idea into question by equating the will of the ruler with law. This equation can become a correspondence between ruler and law such that the former was the embodiment of the latter, thus rendering void any notion of legal accountability. In dramatic form, Euripides had Theseus argue the theoretical case for a ruler being subject to the law. Agesilaus was praised as an 'assiduous servant of the laws', while Arrian argued that even Alexander could not be above law. Set against these examples must be counsels of perfection such as those of Aristotle. The philosopher indicated the rightness of authority being possessed by a man, or men, of 'surpassing excellence', in which case social power would rest on the manifestation of that excellence, rather than on law. Following Aristotle's lead, Dio Chrysostom specifically identified monarchy as being 'based on law and justice' and as 'the most practicable' form of government. In such a system there would be

'...a city, or a number of peoples, or the whole world, well ordered by
one good man's judgement and virtue.'

The process by which the role of a ruler as lawmaker could be transformed into personal and unaccountable authority was illustrated by Herodotus' account of Deioces. On the basis of his renown as a settler of disputes, this Mede progressed from being a notable personage in his village to a fifty-three year reign as king. He was said to have ruled from a remote and unapproachable position, which was justified by the

¹⁷¹ **Laws and the state:** Cic. *Rep.* 6. 13; Gibbon p. 33; Ando p. 9. **Law, king of all:** Pl. *Grg.* 484b; Pind. Fr. 169a; Hes. *Op.* 200ff. **Mycerinus:** Hdt. 2. 129-133. **Athens:** *ibid.* 5. 78.

supposed threat from jealous rivals. A further stage in the absorption of law into the personal authority of a ruler was outlined by Isocrates in the early fourth century BCE. He exhorted subjects to:

‘Obey also the laws set down by the kings, but consider their conduct the strongest law’,

thus associating the standards of equity with the person of the king. There may be hints of kings as the source of perfect, changeless law in Plato, but by the Hellenistic era the idea of a king as the physical embodiment of law was fully formed. Of that period or perhaps later, a *peri Basileias* work ascribed to Diotogenes has been referred to as defining a king as the personification of law, while various pseudonymous texts addressed to the Macedonian and Egyptian monarchies explained the theory behind the concept. This suggested that a monarch, possessed of the right virtues and education, could serve the same function as that ascribed to the law in a democratically controlled city. Law was certainly no guarantee against the arbitrary power of a monarch; in fact there was a strong tradition of specific laws granting just such licence, for example to the kings of Persia.¹⁷²

From this perspective it is possible to consider evidence concerning the relationship between the authority of Roman emperors and the law. In any such review, even one as necessarily cursory as this, a central position must be held by the *lex de imperio Vespasiani*. A unique inscription records the concluding part of this decree of senate and people, probably dated January 70 CE, devoted to the powers of Vespasian. Its details seem most likely to reflect aspects of the authority assumed by/granted to earlier emperors dating back to Gaius or Tiberius, although some of its provisions must have related to the particular circumstances of the new emperor’s accession. In the former category can be placed clauses that recognised Vespasian’s right to make treaties, convene the senate, propose candidates for the elective offices and to extend the boundary of Rome. The overwhelming personal power of the emperor was made clear in clauses that indicated his prerogative to carry out any act ‘...in matters religious or secular, public or private’ that he deemed to be ‘...of advantage to the state

¹⁷² **Rulers under law:** Eur. *Supp.* 430ff; Xen. *Ages.* 7. 2; Arr. *Anab.* 4. 9. **Rulers beyond the law:** Arist. *Pol.* 1288a-b; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 3. 43-45. See Murray (1965) p. 176-177 for general discussion. **Rulers as embodiment of law:** Hdt. 1. 99-101. Isoc. *Ad Dem.* 36; for Plato see Rowe (2000b) p. 307-309; for Diotogenes see Dvornik p. 248 and OCD3 p. 485; for pseudonymous Hellenistic texts see Hahm p. 458-459. **Persia:** Hdt. 3. 31.

and its majesty'. He was placed above law in the sense that he could be excluded from the provisions of any enactment. However, it is in a further clause that we see the most likely reflection of Vespasian's specific situation, and in which the reality of Imperial power was manifested most starkly. This declared to be legal 'all actions, decrees or commands' made by or on behalf of the Emperor before the promulgation of the new law. Two related aspects are of particular interest here. Firstly, the clause contained the clear implication that acts of the senate and of Vitellius taken after 1st July 69 were illegal, thus illustrating the extent to which such a law could be tailored to suit the political and ideological requirements of the moment. Secondly, and explaining the significance of that date, it was the occasion on which Vespasian had first been proclaimed emperor by the troops in Alexandria. The importance of that event was underlined because the Emperor used it to date his accession to the throne. Thus, for all its careful drafting and language of senatorial self-importance, the *Lex* in fact reflected with brutal clarity both the personal authority of the emperor and the military derivation of his political power.¹⁷³

Despite the realities described above, it should come as no surprise, in a society as wedded to *mos maiorum* as that of Rome, that emperors should adopt ideologies stressing their adherence to tradition; law was clearly a major source of established precedent. The subsequent attractiveness and status of these ideologies would undoubtedly have been boosted by their adoption out of necessity by the model for all Rome's Imperial rulers, Augustus. He had emerged triumphant from a lengthy period of civil war in which the traditional political structure of the City had fractured under the strain of its successful territorial expansion and the now ill-contained personal rivalries among its elite. Augustus required the co-operation of that elite in order to ensure his own safety and the stability of his control over the state. In any case, the fate of the would-be autocrat, Julius Caesar, may well have indicated that after 31 BCE there was no other practical way of ruling Rome than through ostensibly 'constitutional' means. This analysis would explain the care with which Augustus accepted only 'legal' and assiduously avoided 'illegal' honours and offices. Prominent themes of the *Res Gestae* were Augustus' obedience to the will of the senate and people of Rome, and a repetition that all his actions were carried out in their name. He

¹⁷³ *Lex*: Sherk 82; Brunt (1977); Levick (1999b) p. 86, 175; Bennett p. 104-105.

took care that the more irregular aspects of his position, such as his lifetime tribunician power, were recorded as being 'enacted by law'. The strength of this ideology can be illustrated by the use made of apparent lapses in its operation. Thus, Ovid attempted to bolster his appeal against banishment by pleading that his condemnation had not been '...through a decree of the senate nor...ordered by a special court' but by Augustus' own words.¹⁷⁴

Observance of the law was a criterion frequently employed to praise or condemn later emperors. Pliny described the situation under Trajan as one in which, 'We are ruled by you and subject to you, but no more than we are to the laws'. Vespasian, Titus, and even, at the start of his reign, Domitian were commended for their fair administration of justice. The last-named was condemned for his later cupidity in making illegal seizures of property, while the recorded excesses of Gaius included the active manipulation of law in order to satisfy his desires. However, even in praising Trajan's submission to the law, Pliny appeared to reveal that the true state of affairs was quite different. In recording that Trajan submitted himself to the laws, the panegyrist immediately added that, 'No one had intended these laws to apply to the emperor'. The extent to which even an emperor such as Trajan was actually beyond legal accountability was contained in Pliny's statement of the opposite;

'...“the law is above the prince”, Caesar bows to the same restrictions as any other consul’.

Thus it was as consul that the Emperor submitted himself to the jurisdiction of statute, presumably reverting to unlimited powers, such as those indicated in the *lex de imperio Vespasiani*, on relinquishing the office.¹⁷⁵

In the sixth century CE Justinian presided over the production of a compilation of previous Roman law, now commonly referred to as the *Digesta*. Reflecting the inevitable development of a complex legalism alongside the increased bureaucratisation of the later Empire, the *Digesta* covered a multitude of topics. One of these concerned the relationship between the powers of emperors and the law.

¹⁷⁴ **Augustus' adherence to law:** RG .1. 3-4, 2; 5. 1; 5. 3, 6, 10. 2; Honoré p. 3; Yavetz (1984) p. 26. **Tribunician power:** RG 10. 1. Ovid: *Tr.* 2. 129-134.

¹⁷⁵ **Trajan praised:** Plin. *Pan.* 24. 4. **Flavians praised:** Suet. *Vesp.* 15, *Tit.* 8, *Dom.* 8. **Domitian and Gaius condemned:** Plin. *Pan.* 50. 1-2; Suet. *Calig.* 40-41. **Trajan's real power:** Plin. *Pan.* 65. 1; Bennett p. 105-106.

Although perhaps not as clear cut as is often supposed, the most direct statements on this subject broadly confirm the notion of the emperor as both source and embodiment of law. The early third century jurist, Ulpian, is quoted as the main source in his statement that

‘...whatever the emperor has determined...(by variously defined formal means) ...is undoubtedly law’.

Ulpian’s account received support from a pronouncement of the second century legal author, Gaius. His albeit cryptic contribution to the issue was that it had never (sic) been doubted that the emperor could make law, ‘...seeing that the emperor himself receives his *imperium* through a law’. It must be reasonable to suppose that the law referred to was the *lex de Imperio Vespasiani*. It should also be noted that doubts have been expressed about the general applicability, precise context and care in drafting of the Ulpian extract. Quite reasonably attention has been drawn to the qualifying formal circumstances that he attached to Imperial law making, while it has also been asserted that the jurist’s use of language on this point was careless, the provision merely raising the emperor to the same legislative level as the senate and people, rather than replacing their authority with his.¹⁷⁶

Other accounts of the relationship between Roman law and political authority stressed the subservience of the former to the latter. From his analytical viewpoint of condemning the personal power of the *principes*, Tacitus devoted a gloomily Sallustian review to the development of Roman legislation. The content of this digression suggested that, in Rome’s long history, legislation had functioned as a vehicle in the pursuit of political disputes between social groups and individuals. In terms of its placement within the text of the *Annals*, the review was used by Tacitus to emphasise the indelible stamp that Augustus had placed on the *res publica*, eclipsing all other sources of authority, including that of law. During the first century CE Musonius was already referring to the *princeps* as ‘law animate’, while the subordination of law to the will of the emperor can be illustrated from among those Imperial rulers usually viewed as least autocratic. Marcus Aurelius, for example, set aside the provisions of the *lex annalis*, the law determining minimum ages for holding political office, allowing the

¹⁷⁶ **Emperor as source of law:** Dig. 1. 4. 1. 1; Gai. *Inst.* 2. 5. **Formal circumstances and context:** Brunt (1977) p. 111; Johnston (1989) p. 152. **Ulpian and Careless language:** Millar (2002) p. 69-87; Campbell (1984) p. 410-411.

15 year old Commodus to become consul in 177 CE. The SHA biographer praised the respect shown by Marcus for the senate, noting that he transferred legal business there. However, the same passage recorded that the Emperor ‘...enrolled in the senate many of his friends’; clearly Marcus was leaving little to chance! In 171 the military needs of the Empire took precedence over the legal arrangements governing the provinces when the Emperor had the senate cede Baetica to his direct control in exchange for the then peaceful Sardinia.¹⁷⁷

It seems fair to conclude that law was more a conduit for than it was a foundation of the authority of Roman emperors. The relevance of law to the initial acquisition of social power in Rome will be revisited when more detailed consideration is given to the accession of emperors (page 224ff). For now, an example from Cassius Dio will suffice on this point. Following his account of the death of Claudius in 54 CE, the historian noted that in terms of ‘strict justice’ the throne should have passed to the Emperor’s legitimate and sufficiently mature son, Britannicus. The historian added that ‘by law the power fell also to Nero because of his adoption’. However, from his early third century CE perspective, Cassius Dio immediately cut through this dilemma by commenting that ‘no claim is stronger than that of arms’. This conclusion has a more substantial feel than the courtroom assertions of Cicero that law should be seen as the opposite of and potential alternative to violence. This is certainly the conclusion that appears foremost in modern studies of power. Foucault emphasised the operation of ‘domination’ rather than ‘right’ (defined as legal limits on power), although his analysis went beyond the normally perceived boundaries of political authority, instead considering power and domination in more basic aspects of human interaction. Others have considered the roles of law and power in straightforward terms. Bourdieu appeared in no doubt about their relationship:

‘Law does no more than symbolically consecrate – by recording it in a form that renders it both eternal and universal – the structure of power relations among the groups and classes.’

In doing so, law was seen to reflect the domination of force, but to

¹⁷⁷ **Tacitus’ review:** *Ann.* 3. 25. 2-28. 2; Wiedemann (2000) p. 529-530. **Musonius:** Dvornik p. 535-536. **Marcus and Commodus:** *SHA Marc.* 22. 12; *Comm.* 2. 3-4; Birley (1987) p. 195-196. **Marcus and the senate:** *SHA Marc.* 10. 1-5; Birley (1987) p. 179, 168.

‘...render it superfluous constantly to reassert power relations through the overt use of force.’

It may be fair to suggest that Romans of the Imperial period had available to them models indicating both the domination of law by autocratic power and limitations of that power through legal restraints. Plutarch, for example, illustrated the differing approaches of Hellenistic kings. Antigonus Monophthalmos was said to have declared that only kings of barbarians were above the law. However, when such generalities collided with a monarch’s specific desires, a different outcome resulted; thus, Seleucus Nicator divorced his wife and married her instead to his son (against both law and custom), proclaiming that ‘...what a king orders is always just’. The second *exemplum* was certainly more frequently reflected in the political and personal behaviour of Roman emperors.¹⁷⁸

Art, symbol and ceremony

After describing the manner in which Cyrus had established himself in supreme power, Xenophon turned his attention to matters of art, symbol and ceremony in the ideology of the new ruler. The historian focused on Cyrus’ organisation of the royal parade, commenting that

‘...it seems to us that the majesty of the procession itself was one of the arts contrived so that his rule (should) not be easy to hold in contempt.’

Aristotle expressed a similar view in an analysis of the positive aspects of oligarchy as a form of government. He suggested that those taking higher magisterial office under such a system should

‘...on entering office...offer magnificent sacrifices or erect some public edifice...decorated with votive offerings’,

the purpose being twofold; to persuade the population that no change in government is necessary and to memorialise the munificence of those in power. Again, ‘Once firmly on the throne’, Deioces, Herodotus’ judicially renowned King of the Medes, ‘...introduced for the first time the ceremonial of royalty’. Plutarch, perhaps influenced by his contacts with the ‘bread and circuses’ aspects of Rome under Trajan and Hadrian, stressed the role of pageants, civic statuary and building programmes in

¹⁷⁸ **Succession to Claudius:** Cass. Dio 61. 1. 1. **Cicero:** *Caecin.* 5; Harries p. 65. **Modern studies:** Foucault (1980) p. 95-96; Kelly (M) p. 33; Bourdieu (1980) p. 132. **Antigonus and Seleucus:** Plut. *Mor* 182c; Plut. *Dem.* 38; Billows p. 62-63.

influencing the mass of the population. He did so in the context of describing the measures taken by the already dominant Pericles to balance the political pressures exerted by the various social forces within Athens. A feature of all these examples is the characterisation of art, symbol and ceremony as ancillary structures of political power rather than as its basis. Other examples and analyses can give those aspects greater prominence. Introducing a broad view of ancient and modern examples in a book subtitled '*Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*', David Cannadine could conclude that, 'Ritual is not the mask of force, but is itself a type of power'. Indeed, in the ominous context of 1936, John Maynard Keynes could write that,

'The failure of the twentieth century democracies is in part attributable to their failure to invest the state with ceremonial'

However, noting the political economist's limiting phrase of 'in part', this review will seek to give due weight to art, symbol and ceremony as elements in social power, while at the same time recognising their essentially auxiliary role.¹⁷⁹

In the Classical world, the interaction between the two was certainly complex. Architecture, in the shape of entire townscapes, could express clear power relationships. The central prominence of the agora and *bouleuterion*, alongside the standard sized building plots and houses of fourth century BCE Priene can be seen as expressing Greek '...ideals of active citizenship and political equality'. The various historical forms of buildings and layout in Pompeii, on the other hand, manifested the social and political hierarchy of Republican Rome and the values of the Augustan monarchy. The first was represented by the gradation in size and opulence of dwellings in relation to their proximity to the forum, while the second was unmistakably present in the temples and adornments of that forum in its appearance before the earthquake of 62 CE. Wider analysis of Roman Imperial cities has suggested that in their fora up to 60% of the statues were of the emperor, directly related to his cult, or of Victory. Returning to Pompeii, however, there may be a caution against over-interpretation of this evidence in the focus given by its citizens to repairs following this disaster. Although recent archaeology has provided new, possibly contradictory data, it appears that restoration of public structures after 62 concentrated on the amphitheatre, baths and other places of entertainment rather than the more overtly political structures of the

¹⁷⁹ **Cyrus:** Xen. *Cyr.* 8. 3. 1. **Aristotle:** *Pol.* 1321a 35-40. **Deioces;** Hdt. 1. 98-99. **Plutarch:** *Per.* 11. 2-13. 3. **Ritual as power:** Cannadine p.19 **Keynes:** *The Listener* 26 August.

forum. Individual buildings could also be used in complex political ways. There can have been little doubt that the Parthenon was constructed to represent and perhaps in some way to justify political domination by Athens, besides any explicitly religious purpose. The combination of the two in annual ceremonies, of which it was the centre, served to highlight its central role. Multifaceted political reasoning must explain the otherwise eccentric decision by the then thirty-year-old Augustus, still not in secure sole control of Rome, to devote large resources to the construction of a personal mausoleum. Its size, larger by far than any preceding Roman tomb and diplomatically never exceeded by later emperors, could hardly have failed to draw comparisons with the monuments of Hellenistic kings, particularly that of Mausolos himself at Halicarnassus. Balancing this clear but perhaps risky declaration of individual domination was the mausoleum's location. Situated within Rome, it provided physical reinforcement for the immediately needed ideological campaign against Antony. His will, made public by Augustus, included the politically damaging stipulation that he be buried with Cleopatra in Egypt. Such an interpretation certainly points to architecture's role as a specific tool in the construction of social power.¹⁸⁰

At least as a declaration of power, there can be no mistaking the use of monumental sculpture. Crucially these, 'Works of art worked; they worked in public', none more so than the colossal images of Egyptian pharaohs, whose meaning of domination must have been as unmistakable to the ancient Greeks and Romans as it is today. Certainly it can have been no coincidence that the Hellenistic monarchs were the most important new clients of art in their era. No doubt drawing strength and authority from their association with the depiction of the gods, statues played a significant role in defining and advertising the nature of their new regimes (**Plate 10**). Their apparent importance in this function for Roman rulers cannot help but be exaggerated for us by the fact that the 120 or so life sized royal portraits surviving from the 300 years between Alexander and Augustus are exceeded by double that number of the latter ruler alone. Thus it is not surprising that monumental sculpture formed a significant part of the evidence allowing the most authoritative study on the subject to declare that,

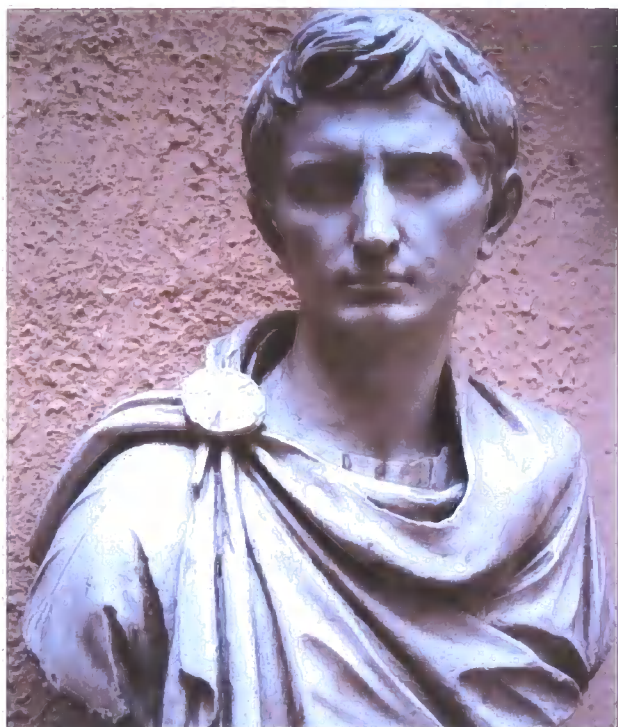
¹⁸⁰ **Priene and Pompeii:** Zanker (1998) p. 3-6. **Wider analysis:** Whittaker (1997) p. 145-146. **Repairs:** Zanker (1998) p. 129-132. **Parthenon:** Plut. *Per* 12; Boardman (1993) p. 84; Osborne (1998) p. 174. **Mausoleum and Antony:** Zanker (1988) p. 72-77; Claridge p. 181-184; Cass. Dio 50. 3. 5.



Terme Ruler

‘Rarely has art been pressed into the service of political power so directly as in the age of Augustus.’

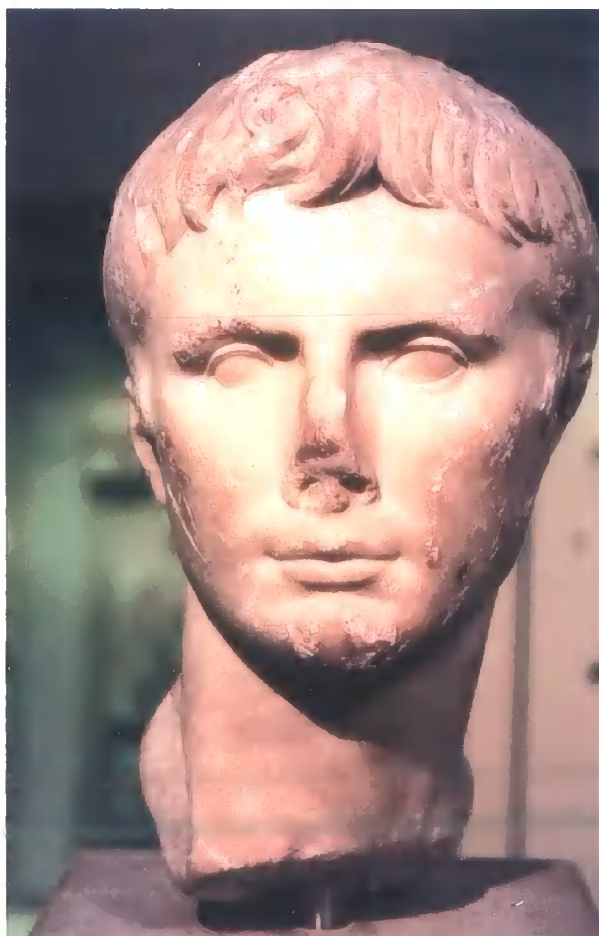
From this large source, limited examples must suffice to draw out the relevant points. Broadly, the Augustan use of statuary in a political context can be illustrated by the conventional view that his sculpted image was made in at least three basic types, each of which is said to reflect specific changes in ideology (**Plate 11**). The earliest statues, representing Octavian as youthful, subdued and with a light beard, appear relevant to his mourning for the recently dead Caesar, thus evoking the Dictator’s memory (**i**). After Actium a clean-shaven, more dynamic image became the norm, perhaps recalling Hellenistic monarchs in the tilt of his head (**ii**). In turn, this was replaced after the political settlement of 27 BCE by what became the standard, essentially ageless image. Significant elements in this settled image of the first *princeps* included the simpler hairstyle, calmer expression and level gaze, all tending to distance him from the appearance of Hellenistic royalty; clearly important for an individual keen to be seen as restorer of traditional Roman values (**iii**). These later features were prominently exemplified by the Prima Porta statue (**Plate 12 i**). At the same time, his bare feet and the accompanying Eros on a dolphin (**ii**), together with the more explicitly divine imagery of the upper part of his breastplate, combined to elevate Augustus above any possible human rivals. In the rising sun and sinking moon there was a suggestion of timeless power (**iii**). Overlaying even the potency of all this iconography, however, was the general appearance of the statue as that of a ‘radiant conqueror’. The staff of authority and outstretched arm of direction reinforced the central detail of the breastplate. There the depiction was of the Parthian surrender in 21 BCE of captured Roman standards, thus elevating the whole into an unmistakable image of military victory. It is impossible to know if copies of this statue were made and, if so, how these were displayed. Even so, the ideological effectiveness of the image should not be underrated because of its discovery in the private villa of Livia’s retirement. Offsetting this relative seclusion, we are told that successive Julio-Claudian emperors frequented the villa and its laurel grove, obtaining from that source foliage for their own ceremonial wreaths and planting new trees to which their names were attached. The comprehensive nature of Augustus’ monopolisation of the symbols of power has also been identified in the gradually increasing inclusion of his head on the obverse of coins



(i) Youthful
image



(ii) 25 BCE



(iii) Posthumous



(i)



(ii)



(iii)

issued by the regime and in the exclusion after 19 BCE of all save his family from the celebration of triumphs.¹⁸¹

The triumph must provide a major focus in considering the relationship between ceremony and power in Rome, although its details demonstrate that the relationship was not straightforward. Of unclear but probably Etruscan origin, the ceremony in which a victorious general paraded through Rome was highly charged with symbols of personal domination and political authority. The glamour and status of the *triumphator* was made clear by his exotic dress and religious make-up, and his role at the centre of an event that absorbed the whole City. The chained captives and glittering booty that followed his chariot demonstrated his exercise of personal domination, while the accompanying soldiers, tableaux and representations of his victories indicated the manner in which that domination had been attained. The general was preceded in the procession by his magisterial lictors, thus linking his military and civil political authority. In this respect, however, it is significant that the whole procedure was only possible by virtue of a vote of the people and senate. Important too were ceremonial details that specifically checked the *triumphator*'s ego; the slave reminding him that he was mortal, the soldiers' ribald chanting to deflect the envy of the gods, the bell and whip attached to his chariot to indicate that he was not invulnerable to prosecution and public scourging. Far from a role indicative of the general's untrammelled power, the triumph was used by Polybius as an example of the manner in which the Roman constitution provided checks and balances between the various sources of political authority in the Republic.¹⁸²

Such limiting features, if they continued in use at all, must have lost all significance following the Augustan and Imperial monopoly of the triumph. Certainly, they were not mentioned in the few surviving detailed accounts of those events. Josephus (Vespasian and Titus, 71 CE) and the SHA (Aurelian, 274 CE) emphasised the spectacle, the demonstration of victory and dominance over conquered peoples, and the

¹⁸¹ **Monumental sculpture:** Osborne (1998) p. 12, 78. **Hellenistic monarchs:** Smith (1993) p. 151; (1988) p. 1, 32. **Survivals:** *ibid.* p. 2. **Augustus and art:** Zanker (1988) p. v. **Changing Augustan image:** Smith (1988) p. 137-138; Zanker (1988) p. 43, 50, 98-99. **Prima Porta:** Smith (1988) p. 138; Zanker (1988) p. 188-192; Klynne and Liljenstolpe p. 127; Plin. NH 15. 137. **Coins:** Wallace-Hadrill (1986) p. 85. **Triumphs:** Lewis and Reinhold 1. 1 n. 1.

¹⁸² **Republican triumph:** Zonar. 7. 21 = Lewis and Reinhold 1. 90; Plut. *Aem.* 32-34; Mattern p. 166ff; OCD3 p. 1554; Polyb. 6. 15.

happy response of the populace to the beneficence of their rulers. Tacitus characteristically used his description of the triumph of Germanicus in 17 CE to make dark hints about the popular prince's likely fate at the hands of Tiberius. However, the detail he gave about the event concentrated on the spectacular appearance of the *triumphator*, the victories achieved and the conquests he had made. The references to triumphs made by Cassius Dio and his epitomators are not full, and, perhaps significantly, later roll up those celebrations with other festivities designed to glorify the emperors. Thus, any previously precise meaning of the triumph was melded into the emperors' general monopoly of glory. However, in relation to Claudius' British triumph of 41 CE, he did mention another humbling aspect of the event in that the Emperor 'followed precedent' in 'ascending the steps of the Capitol on his knees'.¹⁸³

Dio's account of Domitian's celebrations in 89 CE after the Dacian wars included a theme that recurred in the ancient treatment of Imperial triumphs and other ceremonies. This focused on the bogus nature of victories on which triumphs were based, allied to the general unworthiness of the celebrant. Tacitus was more than once scathing about Domitian's 'sham triumph' held in 81 after his campaign in Germany, although modern scholarship has suggested that the Emperor's success was real. Suetonius mocked the bizarre triumphal aspirations of Gaius, and Cassius Dio pointedly claimed that it reflected well on the veracity and authenticity of his history that he did not suppress the outrageous exaggerations of Nero's subversion of triumphal values on his return from Greece in 68 CE. A retrojection of this view of the problematic relationship between power and triumphal ceremony can also be seen in Plutarch. He argued for the appropriateness of Publicola's spectacular addition of a *quadrigae* to his triumphal car, but held that Camillus had gone too far, in that his four horses were white and therefore sacred to Jupiter. The biographer made a similar point in more general terms when he contrasted the reputation of Pyrrhus with that of other Hellenistic kings. Whereas the victories of the former were said to have earned for him legitimate comparison with Alexander, others, particularly Demetrius, '...did but assume Alexander's majesty and pomp, like actors on a stage.' Plutarch discussed the dynamics of the relationship in more explicit terms when he gave an account of the ¹⁸³ *furor* surrounding Pompey's first triumph in 81 BCE. Doubly disqualified because he

¹⁸³ **Imperial triumph:** Jos. *BJ.* 7. 120-157; SHA *Aurel.* 23-24; Tac. *Ann.* 2. 41. 2; Cass. Dio 50. 23. 1, 67. 1. 1-5, 57. 7. 2-8. 4; McCormick (1986) p. 17-18.

was not a senator and was aged only 25, the young lieutenant of Sulla had demanded of his mentor that he be granted a triumph for his victories in Africa during the previous year. Plutarch couched the ensuing debate in overtly political rather than legal terms. Sulla was said to have been sensitive to the danger to his government and honour that could come from such an inappropriate celebration. Pompey was reputed to have responded to initial opposition by suggesting that, 'Sulla reflect that more worshipped the rising than the setting sun'. When his boldness won Sulla's support, Pompey proceeded to use the occasion to show his contempt for senators who still objected and to establish control over his soldiers. Since the whole affair was said to have '...contributed not a little to win him the favour of the multitude', Plutarch had thus harnessed the issue of the triumph to Pompey's domination of all the traditional sources of Roman political power.¹⁸⁴

Other varieties of royal ceremonial had a relationship with political power. In fact, all the public actions of a ruler relate in some way to his position of domination. In the ancient world, the religious aspects of the ceremonies and of the ruler's general role enhanced this connection. Occasions of the transference of power, such as an emperor's funeral or his adoption of a successor, clearly showed this conjunction, although even the former was not immune from satirical mockery. Other formal events, perhaps less directly related to the mechanics of authority, nevertheless displayed a relevance to political power. For instance, the gruesome ceremony of crucifixion has been interpreted with specific reference to the deliberately public exhibition of the state's coercive power. This connection is strengthened by sociological explanations of the fate that could befall those who threaten the person of the monarch. The point is illustrated by the remarkably gruesome execution of Damiens in 1757 after a failed attempt to kill Louis XIV. However, an example pre-dating the Romans indicated the complexity of the relationship between ceremony and power, cautioning against too straightforward a conclusion that the former was always a means to obtain or strengthen the latter. Babylonian priests were said to have devised a ritual by which the city could welcome new conquerors, so introducing an idea to which I will return; that art, symbol and ceremony could serve as a means by which the ruled shaped and

¹⁸⁴ **Domitian:** Tac. *Agr.* 39; *Germ.* 37; Jones, B. p. 129. **Gaius:** Suet. *Calig.* 47. **Nero:** Cass. Dio 63. 20. **Quadrigae:** Pub. 9. 5-6; *Cam.* 7. 1. **Pyrrhus and Demetrius:** Plut. *Dem.* 41. 3-4, 53. 1. **Pompey:** Plut. *Pomp.* 14.

limited the power of the ruler, thus protecting themselves from its potential threat. Before considering this notion (see page 165), attention will be given to the use of particular artefacts as symbols of power, with a special emphasis on the *fascēs*.¹⁸⁵

Towards the end of his account of human social development, Lucretius lamented man's inherent tendency to seek new pleasures and to outdo his fellows;

‘Skins yesterday, purple and gold today – such are the baubles that
embitter human life with resentment and waste it with war’.

For the Roman philosopher, purple dyed cloth and gold were primary symbols of power and domination, with a history traceable at least to Persian royalty. Others, the crown, sceptre and throne, had long and varied provenances, being directly inherited by the Romans from the Etruscans. The radiate crown, traceable on the coinage of Augustus (**Plate 13 i**), but certainly used by Nero, explicitly evoked the sun god, and can be related to the sacred fire (*Hvarena*) of the Persian kings. With earlier manifestations as a symbol of power in Egypt, the eagle had a prominent place in the mythology of the Achaemenid dynasty, and was identified as the standard of the Persian king. Its association with Zeus made it irresistible to the Greeks and Romans as an emblem of royal authority. However, the archetypal symbol of the Roman state and its power was undoubtedly the *fascēs*.¹⁸⁶

Almost certainly of Etruscan origin, the *fascēs* dated back in Roman myth/history to the kings. They have been straightforwardly defined as ‘...symbolising the magistrate's power to inflict physical punishment’. Limits to this authority (the removal of the axes from the consuls' regalia when in Rome itself and a citizen's right of appeal against capital punishment) may or may not have been established by a doubtfully historical *Lex Valeria* in 509 BCE. Livy certainly suggested that the impact of ‘...this dreadful symbol of the power of life and death’ was deliberately lessened by being allowed to only one consul at a time. He also described the origins of the ceremony in which the *fascēs* were lowered before the population gathered in formal assembly, this being portrayed as a magistrate's gesture towards the supposed basis of

¹⁸⁵ **Ceremony and religion:** Cannadine p. 15. **Funerals:** Price (1987); Sen. *Apocol.* 12. 3-13. 1. **Adoption:** Birley (1997) p. 290. **Crucifixion and execution:** Marshall p. 127; Foucault (1977) p. 3-6. **Babylon:** Shipley p. 278.

¹⁸⁶ **Lucretius and symbols:** 1412-1425; Dvornik p. 117; Fowler p. 144. **Radiate crown:** Dvornik p. 119, 524; BMC Augustus. 39. 1; Mattingly (1936) p. xxiii. **Eagle:** Dvornik p. 116-117; Xen. *Cyr.* 7. 1. 1-4.

his authority. Nevertheless, Livy was brutally frank about the original purpose of the *fasces*. In describing the processes by which Romulus founded Rome, he gave pride of place to religious observance, followed by the decision to put the population under the rule of law. However, Romulus was said to have perceived that any laws would only be respected if he were to ‘...invest his own person with majesty, by adopting emblems of authority.’ Foremost amongst these were the lictors carrying their *fasces*. Livy made clear the practical effect of this measure in his account of the first appointment of a dictator;

‘...the solemn sight of his progress through the streets, preceded by the ceremonial axes, had the effect of scaring the commons into a more docile frame of mind.’

Cicero had also been clear about the symbolism of the *fasces*. In an account of an apparently prophetic dream, they were associated with the dangerously over powerful Gaius Marius. Cicero used them to represent undesirable aspects of coercive authority when advising his brother on how to behave as *propraetor* of Asia. The *fasces* have been described as ‘...the most striking visual feature of magisterial authority’. It may not be accidental that a lictor featured on the *Ara Pacis* relief is looking outwards, perhaps ready to meet the gaze of any potentially oppositional viewer (**Plate 13 ii**). Augustus’ authority both in Rome and over other peoples was emphasised in one of the Boscoreale cups. In accepting the surrender of barbarian chiefs, he is depicted as being surrounded by both soldiers and lictors.¹⁸⁷

Three episodes in Livy gave prominence to the *fasces* in relation to political struggles between the elite and commons: in the troubles surrounding the early tribunate the ‘consular rods’ were given first place in a list of official regalia; Appius Claudius and the other *decemvirs* terrified the populace by appearing each with twelve lictors; and the people’s response to the attempted arrest of the popular leaders, Horatius and Valerius, was to seize and smash the rods. A further incident clarified the role of the lictors as manifestations of the consuls’ power. In a significant prelude to the Romans’ humiliation at the Caudine Forks in 321 BCE, the lictors were pointedly ‘...told to move away from the consuls’ before the latter were stripped of their generals’ cloaks

¹⁸⁷ **Origins and definition:** Livy 1. 8. 3; OCD3 p. 587. **Symbolism:** Cornell (1995) p. 166. **Lex Valeria:** ibid p. 226. **One consul at a time:** Livy 2. 1. 8; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 5. 2. 1. **Lowering of the *fasces*:** 2. 7. 7. **Romulus and the law:** 1. 8. 1-3. **Dictator:** 2. 18. 8. **Cicero:** *Div.* 1. 59; *Q Fr.* 1. 1. **Magisterial authority:** Marshall p. 129. **Boscoreale cup:** Zanker (1988) p. 228-229.



(i) Augustus: radiate crown



(ii) Lictor: Ara Pacis

and sent under the yoke. Lictors and *fasces* could be associated with power beyond even that of the consuls. When the consul, Gaius Flaminius, was defeated and killed by Hannibal at Lake Trasimene in 217 BCE, Fabius Maximus was appointed dictator. In order

‘...that the citizens might be more submissive and obedient to his commands...He appeared in public attended by a united band of twenty-four lictors with their *fasces*’.

To emphasise the message, Fabius ordered the remaining consul to

‘...dismiss his lictors, lay aside the insignia of his office, and meet him as a private person’.

The *fasces* as symbols of physical power and coercion were important in Plutarch’s account of Publicola. In the context of concern about the extent of his personal power, Publius Valerius, as he was originally named, decided to

‘...make not only himself but also the government, instead of formidable, submissive and agreeable to the multitude.’

His chosen method was to initiate the already mentioned removal of the axes from the bundle of lictors’ rods, and to have these symbols of intimidation deferentially lowered whenever they were carried into the popular assembly. Such was the impact of this charm offensive that Valerius was rewarded with his new name, with its meaning of ‘people-cherisher’. In representing the legitimate power of the state, the violence inherent in the *fasces* could be used to amplify the actual violence involved in attempts to subvert that authority. Catiline’s conspiracy included a plan to ‘...assassinate the new consuls (and) seize the consular *fasces*’. The terror imposed by Marius could be graphically summed up as he oppressed the Roman people ‘...with his axes at their necks and his rods at their backs’. During the disorders involving Gaius Gracchus his comrades and guest friends were described as being ‘dragged off by the lictors’. The authority represented by *fasces* and by their bearers could represent that embodied in the most senior magistracies. When Aemilius Paullus was sent in 191 BCE to fight the Seleucid monarch, Antiochus III, he held the office of praetor. However, in place of the usual six lictors he was allocated twelve ‘so that his office had a consular dignity’.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ **Tribunate:** 2. 54. **Decemvirs:** 3. 37. **Horatius and Valerius:** 3. 49. **Caudine Forks:** 9. 5-6. **Fabius Maximus:** Plut. *Fab. Max.* 4. 1-2. **Publicola:** Plut. *Pub.* 10. 1-6. **Catiline:** Sall. *Cat.* 18. **Marius:** Plut. *Flam.* 21. 7. **Gracchus:** Plut. *C. Gracch.* 12. 2. **Aemilius Paullus:** Plut. *Aem.* 4. 1.

The accumulation of this evidence supports the view that:

‘Roman society was therefore unusual in that the central magisterial regalia remained directly functional: the fasces continued as both symbol and instrument of executive power’

It is perhaps all the more surprising that this link has not been emphasised in some clearly relevant modern analyses. Admittedly in a primarily Greek context, Hornblower, for example, discussed the relevance of sticks to actual and threatened violence offered to Scythians and Spartan helots. He extended his evidence to cover Negro slaves in America, but did not mention the corporal punishment embedded in the imagery and reality of the *fasces*. In fact the place of the rods and axes in the Roman polity could be seen as fitting neatly into Foucault’s analysis of the role of punishment, particularly capital punishment, in the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. In that context, the use of the *fasces* as instruments of public execution demonstrated the required ‘dissymmetry’ of power between the subject and the state. As such, they represented ‘...a spectacle, not of measure, but of imbalance and excess’.¹⁸⁹

This background is significant in the *fasces*’ enduring role in the symbolism of the Roman State. Their use as markers of stability and traditional correctness in government served to amplify the significance of the association between that normality and the physical coercion that lay at its base. When setting out his stall as an upholder of traditional values, Valerius Maximus invoked the potency of this particular aspect of authoritative regalia, emphasising both religious and secular power: ‘Praise is due to the religious obedience of the twelve *fasces*’. Elsewhere the same author demonstrated his attraction to the *fasces* as symbols, not only of authority in general, but of the oppressive aspect of power. In repeating Livy’s story of T. Manlius Torquatus’ warning to the Roman people that if they made him consul they would suffer under his harsh rectitude, the later author added the comment, ‘How heavy would his consular *fasces* have proved!’. Cassius Dio gave the *fasces* pride of place in his description of Augustus’ strenuous efforts to demonstrate that order and customary authority had been re-established in 28 BCE. Consul for the sixth time, the new ruler

¹⁸⁹ **Symbol and function:** Marshall p. 130. **Modern analysis:** Hornblower (2000) p. 68-70. **Punishment as demonstration of power:** Foucault (1977) p. 48-49.

‘...performed all the other duties according to the traditions which have been handed down from the earliest antiquity. In particular he handed over one set of the *fascēs* to Agrippa, his colleague in the consulship, as it was his duty to do, while he himself used the other set’.

Illustrations abound of the deference due to the dignity of the *fascēs*. Livy described the story of Fabius Verrucosus, sent as a legate to his son when the younger man was consul. The old man was upset that he managed to ride past eleven of the lictors before his son instructed the twelfth to order him to dismount, as was the custom. Valerius Maximus repeated this tale, added a similar one about an earlier father and son of the same family, before he had Verrucosus explain that he had been deliberately testing his son’s adherence to proper behaviour:

‘I did not flout your supreme authority...Neither am I unaware of the claims of respect due to a father, but I consider that public institutions take precedence over private duty.’

The role of the rods and axes as symbols of correct authority can also be illustrated in circumstances when that authority was clearly in peril. At the beginning of the process closed off by Augustus in 27-28 BCE, in the aftermath of the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE, Dolabella, as consul designate, was described as trying to grasp the initiative; the terms used were that he ‘...seized the *fascēs* and the insignia of that office’. During the same turbulent period, when Antony, Octavian and the senate were jockeying for position and legitimate authority was in doubt, soldiers loyal to Octavian attempted to make his unofficial power seem more lawful. They

‘...furnished him lictors provided with *fascēs* and urged him to assume the title of *propraetor*...since they were always marshalled under magistrates.’

Ovid exploited the power of the bundled sticks and axes to evoke both the image and reality of authority. In his account of the grand ceremonies accompanying the opening day of the official calendar ‘...the new rods of office lead the way...’, heading a list of consular regalia. He also employed the *fascēs* as the most potent representation of an unequivocal demand for physical attention and precedence, alluding to the lictors’ traditional cry of ‘*animadvertite*’ (‘give heed’). That processional role of the *fascēs* was depicted in Gordian’s ill-fated parade as Emperor in 238 CE; the rods and axes were given precedence during the aged usurper’s display at Carthage. In an otherwise straightforwardly horticultural review of Gallic trees, Pliny the Elder felt impelled to

draw attention to the birch as ‘...a cause of terror as supplying the magistrates’ rods of office.’ In his second century CE accounts of Sulla’s dictatorship, Appian was able to deploy references to the *fascēs* that evoked their potency as symbols of threatening and legitimate power. Although the description of the Dictator’s appropriation of all twenty-four lictors was based on legal precedent, Appian deliberately connected the event to the practices of Rome’s hated kings. However, he also gave prominence to Sulla’s dismissal of the lictors in the Dictator’s voluntary relinquishment of personal control of the state in 79 BCE. The status and symbolism of the *fascēs* found a place even in the account of Caligula’s unpredictable and arbitrary violence. He was said to have manufactured reasons to dismiss the lawful consuls in 39 CE,

‘...first breaking in pieces their *fascēs*; whereupon one of them took it so much to heart that he killed himself.’¹⁹⁰

Their appearance in omens and dreams is often instructive, confirming both their importance and representation of traditional power and authority. In Tacitus’ account, the first of a series of bad omens disregarded by Caesennius Paetus before his inconclusive invasion of Armenia in 61 CE involved the loss of the horse that carried his consular insignia. Preceding the revolt of Galba, Suetonius declared the appearance of twelve axes after a thunderbolt to be ‘...a clear portent of imperial power.’ Plutarch exploited the symbolism of the *fascēs* in his account of a difficult meeting between Pompey and Lucullus. Wreathed with laurel, the regalia were ‘...carried before both commanders in token of their victories’. The fact that Lucullus’ men provided Pompey’s with some fresh laurel was interpreted as an omen of that the achievements of the former would aid the latter. As straightforward symbols of power, the *fascēs* were lowered by Pompey ‘...out of deference to Metellus as his superior in rank’. Much later, emphasising their role as traditional symbols of the Roman state, Julian was said to have referred to the *fascēs* in his criticism of Constantine. The pagan emperor accused the founder of the Christian empire of being ‘...the very first to advance barbarians even to the rods and robes of consuls.’ Yet again, the *fascēs* had been given precedence, conveying a consistent reminder of the openly coercive basis

¹⁹⁰ **Religious/secular power:** Val. Max. 1. 1. 3. **Torquatus:** Livy 26. 22. 2-9; Val. Max. 6. 4. 1b. **Augustus:** Cass. Dio 53. 1; Marshall p. 132. **Verrucosus:** Livy 24. 44. 9-10; Val. Max. 2. 2. 4a-4b. **Dolabella:** Vell. Pat. 2. 58. 3. **Octavian:** App. *B Civ.* 3. 48. **Calendar:** *Fast.* 1. 81-82. “*animadvertite*”: *Tr.* 5. 6. 3. **Gordian:** Herodian 7. 6. 2. **Birch:** *HN* 16. 75. **Sulla:** App. *B Civ.* 1. 100, 104. **Caligula:** Cass. Dio 59. 20. 3.

of the Roman state. Valerius Maximus provided a suitably grand summary of the status and centrality of the fasces as symbols of the authority of Rome. He recounted the rebuke given by Cincinnatus, when dictator, to the consul, L. Minucius after the latter had allowed himself to be besieged in his own camp by the Aequiculi. The author personified the shamed consul in the form of his principal regalia:

‘So the lordly twelve fasces, in whom resided the highest glory of the senate and the order of knights and the entire people, and by whose nod Latium and the powers of all Italy were governed, bruised and broken abased themselves before dictatorial correction.’¹⁹¹

It is appropriate to end this section on art, symbol and ceremony while discussion of the *fasces* is still in the forefront of our attention. As an icon of the state, the *fasces*’ dominance and longevity was such as to mark Rome’s unique emphasis on physical force as the basis of authority. Although art, symbol and ceremony were of subsidiary importance in the establishment and maintenance of power, the fact that the City’s primary emblem had such a directly coercive form underlines the orientation of Roman thinking on the matter. The primary symbols of other ancient states, in so far as they can be identified, generally stand in clear contrast. Personal (royal) and civic emblems in the form of cylinder or stamp seals had been employed for thousands of years in the Near East. From Archaic to Hellenistic times, engraved gems, rings, coins and shield devices served that function in Greece. Some, such as the eagle and thunderbolt badge of Ptolemaic Egypt or the ubiquitous archer motif of Persia in the fifth century BCE, express power and even imperial aggression. However, this imagery lacks the explicit reference of the rods and axes, backed by law and custom, to physically coerced obedience. With coins as the best guide, the emblems of most early Greek states comprised mythological/religious aspects of civic identity. These could range from the obvious (Poseidon representing the South Italian city of Poseidonia) to the allusive (Pegasus as the symbol of Corinth, referring to the city as the location of Bellerophon’s taming of that mythical beast). Naxos underlined its identification with Dionysus and its fame for wine production by combining his obverse portrait with the image of a bunch of grapes on the reverse. The owl of Athens combined the religious evocation of patroness Athena with the clarity of a modern corporate logo, while

¹⁹¹ **Omens:** Tac. *Ann.* 15. 7; Suet. *Galb.* 8; **Laurel:** Plut. *Luc.* 36. 2-3. **Deference :** Plut. *Pomp.* 19. 5. **Julian:** Amm. Marc. 21. 10. 8. **Cincinnatus:** Val. Max. 2. 7. 7.

others, such as the turtle of Aegina and the *quadrigae* of Syracuse, suggest activities for which those territories were notable, seamanship in the case of Aegina, Olympic chariot racing for Syracuse. Some insignia made punning references to a city's name, for example the apple of Melos and the celery leaf of Selinos. Others appear to defy certain explanation, including the use of the crab on the coinage of Akragas, the cow and calf by Corcyra, and the dolphin and rider employed by Taras for 300 years. Also uncertain in meaning is the double axe of Minoan Crete. Any speculation about some distant relationship with the *fascēs* is without evidential support. Despite the frequent depictions of the axe, the art of that society lacked images of soldiers and war, and is better typified by scenes of nature.¹⁹²

In conclusion, then, what can be said about the over-all relationship between art, symbol and ceremony, and the bases of the Roman emperors' power? A review of the evidence and arguments suggests that the connection was significant, complex and subsidiary. Its significance is established by, if nothing else, the unfailing use of those factors by all Roman regimes. Exposed to unavoidable models, the Egyptian pyramids, the Athenian Parthenon, the imagery and ritual of the Persian and Hellenistic monarchies, Roman rulers and eventually its emperors employed the full range of art, symbol and ceremony to bolster their authority. This usage developed in complex ways and was mediated through traditional Roman mores. It was transformed by Augustus and his successors as new language and symbolism were required to articulate the reality of gradually increasing personal domination. For example, the introduction of proskynesis and the controlled hierarchical right to approach the throne in order to kiss the purple hem of the Imperial robe, ceremonies introduced by Diocletian in the late third century CE, symbolised increased distance between the ruler and the ruled. At a practical level they also served to protect the Emperor from assassination.. This submerged accommodation to the political realities of a regime established by coercion had been anticipated as early as Herodotus. He had described the elaborate court ceremonial of Deioces as ensuring that

¹⁹² **History of emblems:** Spier p. 107-108. **Egypt:** Howgego (1995) p. 53. **Persia:** Carradice and Price: p. 85. **Poseidonia:** Rutter (1983) p. 18. **Corinth:** Howgego (1995) p. 63. **Athens:** Robertson p. 150. **Naxos:** Rutter 1997) p. 110-111. **Aegina:** Carradice and Price p. 77. **Syracuse:** Rutter (1997) p. 114-116. **Melos:** Carradice and Price: p. 77. **Selinos:** Spier p. 119. **Akragas:** Howgego (1995) p. 67. **Corcyra:** Spier p. 121. **Taras:** Rutter (1997) p. 53. **Crete:** Robertson p. 4-8.

‘...those who were in fact his peers should come to regard him as different in kind from themselves and so refrain from plotting against him.’¹⁹³

Of course, Deioces, like Diocletian, had attained dominating power before these measures had been put into place, thus lessening their relevance as bases of authority. At least three other features of art, symbol and ceremony argue for their subsidiary role in the establishment of social power in the ancient world. These are: their general limitations as instruments of change; that their use was vulnerable to condemnation as indicators of moral weakness; and, an aspect already touched upon, their nature as a ‘bottom-up’ phenomenon, reflecting the fine-tuning of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled (see page 157). In relation to change, the power of images may be

‘...to illustrate what exists, to make visible the ideologies behind the reality, and to amplify sentiments as well as faint identities.’

A prime example of this process was the Augustan use of building and decoration to cement Roman control over recently conquered areas of Gaul and Iberia. It seems less clear that images and symbols can create new ideas and identities, reinforcing the truism that, “One only sees what one knows”. The moral attack on the use and therefore the utility of art, symbol and ceremony can be illustrated from Plutarch’s essay, *To an Uneducated Ruler*. He suggested that in order to fulfil his role as a conduit for law and justice in the image of the gods, a ruler ‘...needs no Pheidias nor Polycleitus nor Myron to model him’, rather, it is ‘...by his virtue he forms himself in the likeness of god.’ Elsewhere the author had that sternest critic of ostentation and presumption, Cato the Censor, argue that self-glorifying images served only to inspire envy and opposition. In characteristic fashion, he declared, ‘I prefer to have people ask why there is not a statue of me than why there is one.’ Statues, buildings and even coin imagery raise the issue of who was responsible for their design and production. In relation to coins, there is strength in the argument that, whoever was actually responsible, the ideological importance of their images and legends depended on a perception of the ruler’s personal endorsement. Evidence for central direction, including the operation of specifically political motivation, has already been cited.

Ancient sources suggest the involvement of Roman rulers in the iconography of coins.

¹⁹³ **Complex development:** Wallace-Hadrill (1990) p. 166. **Diocletian:** Price (1987) p. 98; Dvornik p. 521; Lendon (1997) p. 135. **Deioces:** Winton p. 107-108; Hdt. 1. 98-99.

Examples include Augustus' decision to create a type bearing Capricorn, the star sign under which he was born, and Nero's desire to mint an issue depicting him winning the Olympic crown as a player of the lyre. However, it would not be safe to over-interpret the language of Suetonius on such a matter. It was characteristic of his approach to personalise responsibility for events occurring in the reigns of the emperors about whom he wrote. In fact, for the first three centuries of its existence we have no unequivocal literary evidence about how the machinery of Roman Imperial image making and dissemination was organised. A comment by Arrian regarding a statue of Hadrian at Trapezus suggests Imperial interest in such installations, but is hardly definitive. There is more extensive information about the controlled copying and distribution of images in the later empire, and there is no lack of evidence about the destruction of Imperial images after hostile changes of regime. Nevertheless, it is still reasonable to view as anachronistic the idea of ancient image making as centralised propaganda; that characterisation too closely reflects twentieth century and current experience of media manipulation. The initiative of individuals and provincial cities probably played a significant role, although most likely increasingly doing so in response to specific or perceived Imperial wishes as the autocracy of the Empire developed.¹⁹⁴

Religion

In 336 BCE Philip II of Macedon was murdered while parading alongside a statue of himself in the guise of the thirteenth Olympian god. In 337 CE the Emperor Constantine was laid to rest in the Church of the Holy Apostles, unmistakably identified as the thirteenth of their number; his coffin was placed in the midst of the church's eponymous dedicatees, their monuments 'ranged six on either side'. Examples such as these could be multiplied from the ancient sources to demonstrate the relevance of religion to those in possession of dominating power. What linked the cases of Philip and Constantine, besides the near numerical correspondence, was that both monarchs were pushing at the edges of acceptable religious behaviour. Individual megalomania probably accounted in some measure for this conduct. Of interest here, however, is the extent to which such behaviour can be traced to a standard ideology

¹⁹⁴ **Change:** Eder (1990) p. 84; Mierse p. 308-309, 318. **Morality:** Plut. *Ad princ. iner.* 780E-F, *Prae. ger. reip.* 820B. **Coins:** Ando p. 212. Suet. *Aug.* 94, *Nero* 25. **Evidence on image production:** Arr. *Perpl. M. Eux.* 1. 3-4; Zanker (1988) p. 102; Ando p. 228-231. **Propaganda or 'bottom-up':** Wallace-Hadrill (1986) p. 67, 72-74; Levick (1982) p. 104, 107.

linking religion and social power in the sense of the latter being based on the former, even when the proposed relationship appeared to be stretched beyond tolerable limits.¹⁹⁵

Homer and Hesiod provided early and authoritative support for such a link. The latter wrote of men that it was 'from Zeus that they are kings', and of 'Aeetes...that Zeus-fostered king'. Homer combined the divine origins of a monarch's command and its potency in human terms:

'There's passion in kings; they hold power from Zeus...Let there be one commander, one authority holding his royal staff and precedence from Zeus'.

However, the context of Homer's pronouncements needs to be borne in mind. They were words given to Odysseus during the latter's desperate efforts to bolster the position of Agamemnon as leader of the Greek expedition during an all-out mutiny. In such a situation exaggerated claims for the authority of a leader would not seem to be out of place. Nevertheless, elsewhere in calmer circumstances Homer described the provenance of Agamemnon's staff of office, indicating that it had been fashioned by Hephaestus and passed from Zeus via Hermes to the human ancestors of the King. Early in his account, Herodotus recorded divine sanction for the rule of Gyges, and examples of apparently divine intervention on behalf of pious rulers, such as the priest-pharaoh, Sethos. Interestingly for the central argument of this thesis, that pharaoh was said to have been threatened because he '...neglected the warrior class of the Egyptians'. Recourse to the aid of Hephaestus resulted in victory when the bowstrings and other consumable equipment of the invading Assyrians were eaten by mice. It should be noted that alongside these stories of divine endorsement and rewards for genuine piety Herodotus placed accounts of the explicit manipulation of religious sentiment to reinforce the social power of rulers. The author portrayed himself as amazed by the Athenians' credulity in allowing Pisistratus to use the very human Phye as an impersonation of the goddess Athena. On the other hand, Herodotus appeared to admire the wisdom of Pharaoh Amasis, who legitimised his transformation from lowly origins to supreme ruler by the trick of creating a statue of a god from gold melted

¹⁹⁵ **Philip II:** Diod 16. 92. 5. **Constantine:** Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 4. 60. 2-3, 71. 2. **Unacceptable behaviour:** Hornblower (1991) p. 260; Eusebius worked hard to make Constantine's scheme tolerable, making the disarming suggestion that the Emperor's purpose was that 'he might benefit from the worship which would be conducted there in honour of the Apostles' (*Vit. Const.* 60. 1).

down from an ornate footbath. He then pointed out to his subjects that they appeared to have no difficulty in revering as sacred an object whose materials had once formed a very humble object.¹⁹⁶

By the fourth century BCE the relationship between gods and kings was portrayed as being more complex and ambivalent. In the course of explaining the superiority of monarchy over other forms of government, Isocrates was explicitly reluctant to employ divine imagery. He stressed that these were uncertain matters about which we could only speculate, although the orator alluded to the idea that Zeus ruled the other gods. By analogy, he argued, 'we all hold monarchy in high regard'. Despite the second century CE Arrian's attempts to suggest otherwise, it seems probable that Alexander the Great did regard himself to be divine; mention has already been made of his father's apparent aspirations. However, it was not until the 290s BCE that Alexander was honoured as a god. As could be noted of the Herodotean examples given above, it was perhaps no coincidence that this event and the first deification of a living Hellenistic ruler in 279 both occurred in Egypt, reflecting that country's ancient tradition of god-pharaohs. The relationship between kings and gods was an element in philosophical debate about ethics. While distancing the person of the monarch from the gods, the divine order was used as a model and exemplar to be copied by the 'good king'. It was accepted that such emulation could go only so far. The rule of the good king on earth did not parallel that of Zeus in heaven. Rather, in the quintessentially unified conception of the stoics, the human and divine operated in a single cosmos, characterised by stable relationships governed by the rule of Zeus. It was within this ethical structure that Seneca advised the young Nero that he would one day have to account for his actions to the immortal gods, and that in the meantime he should aspire to behave towards his subjects in a manner similar to that which he hoped he would be treated by the gods. The gulf that could be seen to exist between an emperor and the divine was made even clearer in the same author's satirical treatment of Claudius. Seneca went so far as to introduce the argument that the deification of such an individual could undermine the logic of worshipping any of the gods.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ **Hesiod:** *Theog.* 96, 993; **Homer:** *Il.* 2. 195-198; Redfield p. 40. **Gyges:** *Hdt.* 1. 13. **Sethos:** *ibid.* 2. 141. **Pisistratus:** *ibid.* 1. 59 **Amasis:** *ibid.* 2. 172.

¹⁹⁷ **Isocrates:** *Nic.* 26. **Alexander:** *Arr. Anab.* 3. 3, 4. 11-12, 7. 19-20; Shipley p. 159. **Zeus and the 'good king':** *Dio Chrys. Or.* 3. 82; Swain (1996) p. 195-200. **Nero:** *Sen. Clem.* 1.1 4, 1. 7. 1; *Sen. Apocol.* 7. 3, 9. 3, 11. 4.

Practical models available to the Romans for the relationship between rulers and the divine had been constructed by the *diadochoi*. The stress that they laid on religion and divine patronage probably should be seen as part of a relationship of mutual obligation; divine benefaction earned at a cost of ritual honours. At the strongest end of the spectrum, the development of Hellenistic ruler-cult was a complex process, involving a variety of culturally and geographically associated features. More generally, monarchs in the period demonstrated a variety of methods that could be said to have associated aspects of the divine with political authority. Coins of Attalus I, the founder of the Pergamene royal dynasty, showed the monarch in a helmet adorned with the horns of a bull, thus representing his chosen deity, Dionysus. Horns can also be seen on images of Antigonus Gonatas, this time evoking Pan, the god who was said to have aided the Macedonians in defeating the Celts in 277 BCE. An accession decree of Antiochus I recorded the claim of Seleucus I to be a descendent of Apollo. The adoption of a titular name could evoke the divine/regal relationship. Antiochus I again provided an example, being known as *Soter* ('Saviour'), an epithet of Zeus. Other relevant assumed names included the straightforward *Theos* ('God') of Antiochus II, and *Epiphanes*, taken by a number of kings, (with a useful double meaning of 'eminent' and 'manifest', suggesting the presence of a god amongst humans). A direct expression of this latter idea can be seen in the behaviour of Demetrius Poliorcetes. He perhaps lived for a time in Apollo's temple on Delos and is attested to have resided in the Parthenon during 304-303 BCE.¹⁹⁸

In what ways, if any, did the authority of Roman rulers reflect these ideas and political models? This question must be seen in relation to the fact that:

'As part of Roman public life, religion was (and always had been) a part of the political struggles and disagreements in the city'.

Sallust could not have made this religious dimension clearer than in the speech he reported of Gaius Memmius during the political disputes that accompanied the campaign against Jugurtha of 109 BCE. While inciting the Roman populace against the privileged members of the oligarchic elite, Memmius accused the latter of strutting

¹⁹⁸ **Mutual obligation:** Lund p. 161-171. **Hellenistic ruler-cult:** Shipley p. 156-163. **Attalus and Antigonus:** *ibid.* p. 64-65. **Seleucus:** Austin (1981) 139. **Adopted names:** Shipley p. 65-66; Fears p. 875-876. **Demetrius:** Nock p. 4; Plut. *Dem.* 23. 3.

‘...proudly before your faces flaunting their priesthoods and consulships’. Livy’s analysis of the clashes between patricians and plebeians in the early Republic was given strongly religious colouring, although the extent to which his accounts reflected the religious aspects of contemporary Augustan ideology, described below, must be recognised. The relationship between control of religion and political power was a constant theme, at least as seen from a late Republican perspective. During the first century BCE, Sulla and his enemies engaged in a legislative battle about senatorial and popular authority over the priestly colleges; religious issues, language and symbolism were significant elements in the political disputes between Cicero and Clodius, and in the rebellion of Catiline.¹⁹⁹

In the context of the Hellenistic examples already cited and of religious content in the tradition of Roman political disputes, it was perhaps a short and logical step for the rulers of the City to move from the evocation and use of the divine to its personal appropriation. The idea that humans could take on divine form, at least posthumously, could be given at least some orthodox credence by the examples of Hercules and Romulus. To characterise living Romans as divine was problematic and vulnerable to attack from the forces of religious conservatism, philosophical scepticism and, most powerfully, from accusations of contravening the traditions of *mos maiorum*. Therefore it is perhaps both unsurprising and illustrative of the political manipulation of religion that individuals renowned for stretching the traditions of the divine were also remarkable for the challenges that they presented to political orthodoxy. During his late third to early second century BCE prominence, P. Scipio Africanus was said to be famous for his attachment to Jupiter. In Livy’s subtle account, elements are woven together of the general’s personality and convictions, his deliberate management of the perceptions of others, the evocation of desirable historical exemplars (in this case, Alexander the Great), and the gullibility of public opinion. Sulla’s claims to a relationship with Fortune merited detailed discussion by Plutarch. He portrayed Sulla as being remarkable in the extent to which he presented himself as ‘...entirely the creature of this deity’ and, of his achievements, ‘...to attribute more to Fortune than to his own excellence’. The strength of the association was represented by Sulla’s

¹⁹⁹ **Politics and religion in Rome:** Beard, North and Price p. 134-135; Lintott (1999) p. 182; Sall. *Iug.* 31. 10; Livy, for example, 10. 6. 1-9. 2. **Sulla:** Cass. Dio 37. 37. 1-2. **Cicero, Clodius and Catiline:** Beard, North and Price p. 139-140.

adoption of *Felix* ('lucky', 'fortunate') as an additional name. Another Roman leader, Q. Caecilius Metellus, coincidentally consul with Sulla in 80 BCE, also acquired an extra name with strong religious overtones; in his case, *Pius*. These ascriptions of religious qualities to living persons raise the associated topic of virtues as attributes of individuals (see pages 193-195). Here it suffices to record the comment that there was 'deliberate ambiguity' in the assumed status of such qualities, leaving open the question of the literal nature of the claims to divine associations.²⁰⁰

Ambiguity was clearly manifested in the person and public image of Julius Caesar. Few if any ancient Romans have been subjected to such close academic scrutiny with regard to the nature and political significance of their links with the gods. His claims to divine association went beyond those of others in that he identified Venus as an ancestor rather than as a mere patron. Some of the honours granted to Caesar, for example, the public celebration of his birthday, and attaching his name to a calendar month and an electoral tribe, had specific resonance with divine tributes made to Hellenistic monarchs. There can be no doubt that Caesar saw himself and was seen as exceptional in having moved beyond the role of a political leader in the Roman tradition. His posthumous deification stood as testament to the uniqueness of his position. Demonstrable in the prelude to the Ides of March was the conjunction between his subversion of political convention, the establishment of his personal domination and the use he made of religion in these processes. Shortly before his assassination, Caesar was said to have received a delegation of senators at the portico of the Temple of Venus Genetrix. Tellingly, this temple had been built by the Dictator in honour of his claimed ancestress within the forum constructed in his name. In addition to these unmistakable general demonstrations of Caesar's assumption of divinely sanctioned domination, the message was underlined by his refusal to rise from his seat to greet the senators, even when reminded of the necessary protocol. The amalgam of political, personal and religious elements in this reported incident is representative of the difficulty in isolating Caesar's approach to religion. Whether or not he had wished to be recognised as a god before his death there can be no doubt that

²⁰⁰ **Posthumous deification:** Price (1987) p. 73. **Problematic:** Eden p. 9. **Scipio:** Livy 26. 19. 3-9. **Sulla and Fortune:** Plut. *Sull.* 6. 2-7; Keaveney p. 40-42. **Metellus:** Fears p. 877. **Ambiguity:** Wallace-Hadrill (1981) p. 77.

religion played a large part in his political ideology, a part taken up and amplified by his eventual successor.²⁰¹

Certainly religion held a prominent place in the ideology of the Augustan regime; even the new name adopted by Octavian in 27 BCE evoked the idea of a ruler who was specifically favoured by the gods. He drew on the legacy of his adopted father in this respect. In statuary and coins Augustus promoted the divine association between a comet seen in 44 BCE and games being held at the same time in honour of Caesar. A coin of 17 BCE depicted the deceased dictator on the obverse, complete with the 'divine' star, while the reverse carried an image of Augustus and the straightforward legend 'DIVI F(ilius) AUGUSTUS' (**Plate 14**). Religious imagery was employed throughout the long period of the first *princeps*' domination, both directly in images of Augustus, and in more generalised contexts. In the *Res Gestae*, prominent note was made of temple building and restoration, and as part of the climax to the account of his achievements piety was given a place as one of the *princeps*' virtues inscribed on the *clupeus aureus*. Although a great deal more has been said elsewhere and could be added here about religion in Augustan political ideology, the examples already cited serve at the same time to illustrate its significance and to caution against over interpretation. Viewed in the specific context of the bases of Augustus' domination and of the ideology that supported his rule, the potency of religion, as of the other non-coercive factors considered in this chapter, can be seen to diminish.²⁰²

The general point to be made here is that Augustus' domination did not rely on religion as a major support; rather it was only natural in the Roman context that his pre-eminence, (established and maintained through overwhelming force, and developed over so long a period), would be reflected by and sublimated into religion, as it was into all important aspects of social life. In relation to the specific examples cited above, it was notable that for all its ground-breaking importance, the religious and other ideology of Julius Caesar was gradually dropped by the Augustan regime.

²⁰¹ **Studies of Julius Caesar:** Yavetz (1983) Ch. 1. **Venus:** Suet. *Iul.* 6. **Divine honours:** Beard, North and Price p. 141. **Caesar's unique position:** Yavetz (1983) p. 55; Suet. *Iul.* 88. **Temple incident:** Yavetz (1983) p. 197-198; Zanker (1988) p. 44; Suet. *Iul.* 78. **Caesar and religion:** see, for example, Weinstock (1971), Beard, North and Price p. 140ff, Price (1987) p. 71 and Yavetz (1983) p. 45ff.

²⁰² **Augustus' name:** Suet. *Aug.* 7. **Caesar and Augustus:** Zanker (1988) p. 34-35; BMC Augustus 71. **Temples:** RG 20. 4, 21. 1. **Clupeus Aureus:** ibid. 34. 2. **Discussion elsewhere:** Liebeschuetz (1979) p. 55-101; Price (1996).



(i) Julius Caesar and star



(ii) Augustus: DIVI F

For example, the *princeps*' adoptive father received scant mention in the *Res Gestae*. Besides references to the execution of his will and to gifts made to the Temple of the Divine Julius, filial revenge was cited as a secondary justification for the civil wars fought by Augustus after 44 BCE, secondary, that is, to his demonstration of military pre-eminence in raising an army with which he '...championed the liberty of the republic'. Temple construction and restoration were recorded as items in a long list of other building activity, while work on the more overtly political Curia and Capitol had pride of place. Similarly, piety was placed fourth in the list of Augustan attributes on the 'Golden Shield', being preceded by both clemency and justice in a list headed by the martial quality of *virtus*.²⁰³

A central feature of the relationship between religion and the authority of Augustus and his successors was that of ruler cult. As in all aspects of Augustan ideology, there was change and gradual refinement of the proclaimed relationship between the *princeps* and the gods. This development has already been alluded to in the use made of Julius Caesar's legacy. In his own right, Augustus can be seen to progress from rather loose religious interpretations and behaviour, evoking the world of the Hellenistic monarchs, to much tighter and more controlled formulations. The earlier stage can be represented by Suetonius' account of 'stories' concerning Octavian dressing as Apollo at a 'dinner of the Twelve Gods' during his dispute with Antony. By 27-25 BCE Agrippa's plan to place an effigy of Augustus within the newly constructed Pantheon was rejected by the *princeps*; instead it was Julius Caesar who was represented among the Olympian gods inside, while statues of Augustus and Agrippa were positioned in an ante-chamber. Images of Augustus as a priest and as leading communal acts of piety were more typical of his mature ideology (**Plate 15**), as was the mixture of central control and cultural sensitivity with which locally based more direct manifestations of emperor worship were managed. Between 29 and 2 BCE examples can be cited from Asia, Spain, Gaul and Germany of altars dedicated as centres for some unclear combination of the cults of Roma and Augustus. In relation to the use of religion to bolster political power, it is of interest that the last three of these instances were specifically designed as focal points for unifying local tribes in their acceptance of Roman rule. Starting in the City of Rome itself, Augustus can be seen to

²⁰³ **Caesar in the RG:** 1. 1, 2, 15. 1, 21. 2. **Building:** RG 19-21.



(i) Augustus as priest



(ii) Augustus and priests: Ara Pacis

have moved carefully to place himself and his family at the centre of religious practice. Having waited, as demanded by tradition, for the death of the incumbent, he took on the role of *pontifex maximus* in 12 BCE. Instead of moving to the official residence associated with that office, he made over part of his home on the Palatine to public land, on which he dedicated a shrine to Vesta. Within that shrine he also placed his household gods, the *lares* and *penates*. Such measures demonstrated the conjunction of religious reform, political control and individual domination that characterised the personal and enduring rule of Augustus and his successors.²⁰⁴

Our view of the extent to which those successors incorporated divine elements into their personas and within their political ideologies is inevitably clouded by the attitudes of our ancient sources. Although the Augustan precedent ensured that religion had a significant place, there can be little doubt that the form it took in the different regimes varied widely. The loyalist Velleius Paterculus suggested that it was genuine piety rather than the exercise of political domination that led Tiberius to deify Augustus. However, we are told by Tacitus that that emperor tried to limit the use of his step-father's divinity as subject matter in personally or politically motivated legal proceedings. Suetonius recorded Tiberius' refusal of various divine honours, and while some provincial inscriptions could be addressed directly, 'To the god Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the deified Augustus', others indicated his reluctance to be seen as anything but human. By contrast, Emperors such as Gaius were portrayed by ancient authors as subverting proper behaviour and as being deranged in their claims to personal divinity. Cassius Dio's account of Gaius' excesses contained an interesting detail with regard to the perceived political status of the Emperor's posings as a god. The author recounted a story in which a Gallic shoemaker laughed out-loud at the spectacle of Gaius, in the guise of Jupiter, uttering oracles from a public platform. Summoned by the Emperor to give an answer to the question, "What do I seem to you to be?", the artisan readily responded, "A big humbug". Beyond recording that the man 'met with no harm', Dio added the editorial comment that:

²⁰⁴ **Octavian as Apollo:** Suet. *Aug.* 70; Beard, North and Price p. 209. **Pantheon:** Cass. Dio 53. 27. 3. **Tribal loyalty:** Beard, North and Price p. 352-353. **Pontifex maximus and household gods:** Liebeschuetz (1979) p. 70-72; Beard, North and Price p. 184-189. **Tradition and change:** Zanker (1988) p. 174; Price (1996) p. 820.

‘Thus it is, apparently, that persons of such rank as Gaius can bear the frankness of the common herd more easily than that of those who hold high position.’

The historian’s observation indicated at the same time the relevant political context in which to place Gaius’ religious posturing and the ever present sensitivity to personal rivalry among the Roman elite.²⁰⁵

Imperial deification could cause difficulties for our ancient authors. For example, Pliny had appeared comfortable in recording that Trajan had given Nerva ‘his place among the stars’ simply because he ‘thought he was a god’. However, the panegyrist immediately went on to suggest anachronistically that the proof of the latter’s divinity lay in his choice of the former as his successor, thus clearly subordinating any specifically religious focus to a concern with political realities. Later he compounded the problem as he attempted to evoke the joy that must be felt by deified Nerva as he stood ‘second in comparison’ to the still human Trajan. A ‘bad’ emperor, such as Domitian, was widely criticised in our ancient sources for misusing religion in the cause of personal glorification; in his case, for example, by requiring his subjects to refer to him by the formula, ‘master and god’. However, modern analysis has suggested that even ‘good’ emperors, such as Trajan, manipulated religious sentiment and practice in order to pursue the goals of political success and individual renown. The *optimus princeps* may have engineered the then unique deification both of his biological father and sister in order to promote a public mood favourable to his desired emulation of Alexander’s conquests in the East. Again, whereas Tacitus was clearly critical of the senate’s ‘customary sycophancy’ in placing a statue of Nero in the Temple of Mars Ultor, Pausanias could display his general favour towards Hadrian in a disarmingly matter-of-fact report of seeing an image of that emperor in the Parthenon. That Pausanias’ attitude reflected the then contemporary norm receives support from evidence about temple dedications. Recently it has been suggested that a number of provincial temples thought to be to Hadrian with, or in the guise of, Zeus were in fact intended for the worship of the Emperor alone. Hadrian provides a good example of a trend towards the emperors’ increasingly personal focus on religion, in addition to it being viewed or used as a substantive support for political power. His initiation at

²⁰⁵ **Ancient sources:** Price (1987) p. 81-82. **Tiberius:** Vell. Pat. 2. 126. 1; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 73. 2-4; Suet. *Tib.* 26; Sherk 31. **Gaius:** Suet. *Cal.* 22; Cass. Dio 59. 26. 8-9.

Eleusis and many endowments made to Greek religious sites are best seen as a manifestation of his general admiration of Greek culture. At the same time, the Emperor's policy of unifying the City of Rome and its provinces was furthered by the attention paid to the construction of the temple of Venus and Roma in the City. Worship of the goddess Roma had long been a symbol of the wider Empire's reverence for the Imperial centre, so Hadrian's action was clearly intended to strengthen this bond. At the extremes, the promotion of an emperor's personal religion could actually undermine his political authority. Nowhere was this better illustrated than in the wild excesses of the teenage Syrian, Elagabalus. His brief reign in the early third century was brought to an end at least in part because of his adherence to eastern cult rather than the traditional state religious practice of Rome.²⁰⁶

Other political uses of religion included the symbolism of Vespasian's decision to rebuild the Temple of the Divine Claudius, pulled down by Nero to make way for his Golden House. In this way Vespasian signalled at once his adherence to the line of 'legitimate' emperors, his repudiation of the Neronian regime and, in returning to pious communal use land appropriated by Nero for personal pleasure, an appreciation of the traditional relationship between religion and the *res publica*. Without any very specific political meaning, beyond a general heightening of the Emperor's status and mystique, the so-called thunderbolt and rain miracles of Marcus Aurelius were given prominence both by our sources and monumentally in the Column erected in his memory. Diocletian used the model of the Olympian hierarchy to articulate the differential power held by members of the Tetrarchy. His identification with Jupiter, as opposed to the Hercules of his colleague Maximian, can have left no doubt as to where supreme authority lay. More generally, Diocletian's determined conservatism with regard to the divine has been said to demonstrate the role of religion as a 'strong social and political cement'. This takes us back to the Roman ideal, expressed most famously by Virgil, of a conjunction between Romans' reverence for the traditional gods and those deities' watchful fostering of the City's success. However, the fragility, or perhaps better, the malleability of this link was to be made clear within a very few years of Diocletian's retirement in 305 CE. Emerging to dominate first the western half

²⁰⁶ **Trajan and Nerva:** Plin. *Pan.* 11.2-4, 89. 2. **Domitian:** Suet. *Dom.* 13. **Trajan's manipulation:** Bennett p. 188-190. **Nero:** Tac. *Ann.* 13. 8. 1. **Hadrian:** Paus. 1. 24. 7; Liebeschuetz (2000) p. 988-989. **Temple dedications:** Burrell p. 31-32. **Elagabalus:** Cass. Dio 80. 11. 1; OCD3 p. 221-222.

of the Empire in 312, and to become supreme over all by 324, Constantine established a new religion, Christianity, as the state's view of the divine. It is true that a Christian apologist such as Eusebius could couch the relationship between the Emperor and his god in terms very similar to those of Virgil's traditional reciprocal deal, that is, reverence and worship in exchange for victory and earthly domination. Indeed, it has been argued that the move of Christianity to the centre of Roman political life can profitably be examined from the angle of that religion's gradual 'conversion' to Roman Imperial ideals. Nevertheless, the advent of state Christianity altered the overall dynamics of the link between Imperial authority and religion too profoundly to be considered by this thesis.²⁰⁷

Brief as this review has been, certain features of the relationship between social power and religion have been illustrated sufficiently to indicate its closeness, without demonstrating that the former was necessarily based on the latter. One of the main reasons for this conclusion was the very ubiquity of religion in the ancient world. Thales was said to have declared that everything was 'full of gods', a view that can be confirmed in some apparently unlikely places. At the outset of his treatise on *How to be a Good Cavalry Commander*, Xenophon had exemplified the inescapable role of the divine;

'Once you have secured the favour of the gods, you next have to recruit horsemen...'

Reflecting its Greek precursor, Roman religion '...was a system ideologically committed to the public, not the private, sphere'. Quite specifically, it could be stated that the divinity of the emperors was a self-evident matter of public action and perception. Indeed, that this idea could be contained in a conventional source such as Valerius Maximus adds to its credibility as a commonplace of the prevailing ideology. As has already been commented in relation to Augustus (pages 172-174), it is hardly surprising that there was a recurring religious element in the emperors' ideology of power. Also relevant, and stemming from Greek and Hellenistic practice, was a readiness to use religious imagery to honour prominent men. This can be well illustrated in Roman terms by the evocation of Jupiter in the *triumphator's* face

²⁰⁷ **Vespasian:** Levick (1999b) p. 126. **Marcus.** HA *Marc.* 24. 4; Cass. Dio 71. 8-10. **Diocletian:** Pan. Lat. 11. 10-12; Williams, S. p. 156; Verg. *Aen.* 6. 757-889, 8. 337-359. **Constantine:** Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 1. 1. 3, 2. 24. 3. **'Conversion' of Christianity:** Brown p. 82.

painting and dress, itself thought to have its origins in the traditional appearance of the Kings of Rome. At the same time, such associations refocus attention onto the military core of Roman social power. Again linking the issues of the divine, virtue and coercion, Plutarch, in a philosophically coloured diversion from his account of Aristides, considered the apparently paradoxical relationship between rulers' aspirations and behaviour. Noting that the epithet 'The Just' had been attached to Aristides, Plutarch commented that such ascribed royal names were more usually coined in the language of violence rather than virtue. This, he lamented, was at odds with the association between kings and the divine, of whose attributes (immortality, power and virtue) Plutarch declared the last to be the noblest.²⁰⁸

Conclusion

To the apparently non-coercive bases of Imperial authority considered in this chapter could be added a number of others; an emperor's control of patronage and his provision for the everyday needs of his subjects would be two. The word limit imposed on this thesis is one reason for their omission in any detail, while the danger of using more evidence than is necessary to support my basic argument is another. In fact, a few words will be said about patronage, largely in order to help illustrate the second of these explanations.

In considering in some detail the factors of law, religion, and art, symbol and ceremony, each has been seen to play an important, although subsidiary role as a basis for the power of a Roman emperor. In addition, coercion and military domination have been shown to pervade those features. Thus, law has emerged largely as a legitimising mask of domination, rather than as tool necessary for its establishment. At least in relation to the standard view of the emperors as having eclipsed the political power of the senate, there must be some irony in the fact that that body gradually increased its specifically legal role (at the expense of the people) throughout the Imperial period. As if to emphasise the point, this increased legal activity principally involved regular decrees of honour to the emperor and his family. It must also be significant that

²⁰⁸ **Thales and the public nature of religion:** Cartledge p.14; Xen. *Eq. mag.* 1. 1-2; Val. Max. 1. praef.; Wardle p. 491-493. **Religious imagery:** Shipley p. 158. **Triumph:** Beard, North and Price p. 44-45. **Epithets:** Plut. *Arist.* 6. The biographer listed as examples of the norm: Besieger, Thunderbolt, Conqueror, Eagle and Hawk, all associated with Hellenistic monarchs.

specifically legal statements of, let alone challenges to, an emperor's power are barely traceable in the record. Thus,

‘The Imperial regime simply cannot be adequately characterised in constitutional terms.’

The certainty of this conclusion must be upheld today, even though historians of the first half of the last century seemed largely unable to conceive of Ancient Rome in any other way. The 1934 edition of the Cambridge Ancient History, reprinted with corrections as late as 1971, characterised Augustus' 27 BCE measures concerning his powers as ‘the act of settlement’. It is surely not too fanciful to imagine the author's barely resisted temptation to use capital letters in this description, thus unambiguously evoking that 1701 landmark of British constitutional history. As far as religion is concerned, the ancient views of Polybius clearly indicated its Roman practices to be instrumental to the maintenance of social power, while more modern commentators have pointed out the unusually close correlation between Rome's military activities and its traditional worship of the divine. Again, in relation to art, its ancillary role has been made evident as a form of expression and conduit of already established social power. Ruskin's general comment, quoted with obvious regret in a modern context by Kenneth Clark, must be relevant to Ancient Rome:

‘No great art ever yet arose on earth but among a nation of soldiers’.

As an example of how the examination of other potential bases of Imperial power would have revealed them also to be both subsidiary to and reflective of coercion, the role of patronage will be considered in brief.²⁰⁹

The workings of patronage in Roman society have been much studied, and its operation has been defined at many different levels of interaction. There can be no doubt that patronage remained a vital way of organising the exchange of economic and social goods among the Roman elite throughout the Republic and Empire. Between those periods its effective weight shifted from the number and status of an individual's clients to his proximity to the emperor. Patronage has been described in that context as ‘the dominant and generalised form of institutionalised resource allocation,’ that is, the basis of social power. As such, the formal power structures of the traditional Roman

²⁰⁹ **Law and the senate:** Rowe, G. p. 41-43, 173. **Absence of Legal statements:** Millar (1992) p. 616-617. **‘Act of Settlement’:** Jones, H. S. p. 128; Clark, G. p. 190-192. **Religion:** Polyb. 6. 56. 6-14; Harris p. 9-10. **Art:** Clark, K. p. 301.

state and the operation of private and personal ties of patronage are claimed to be one and the same. This system was seen as having been adapted rather than replaced by the emperors. Although perhaps a somewhat unreliable source from which to gather factual evidence about Claudius, Seneca has been used to provide confirmation that that emperor employed patronage rather than coercion to secure his grip on power. However, closer analysis suggests that the portrayal is of the former being used as a mask for the latter. This is certainly a viewpoint that can be found in sociological theorising about patronage. Bourdieu identified the phenomenon as a way of establishing domination through the creation of debt. As such, patronage formed a type of euphemised violence. The argument continued by pointing out that in pre-capitalist societies, lacking depersonalised mechanisms for debt, such as credit and banks, the personal nature of economically dependent relationships contained a masked, but clearly present, element of coercive power. Certainly Tacitus recorded the danger inherent in the development of a high reputation through patronage when the emperor claimed all such distinction: ‘...the greatness of one’s reputation began to mean extermination’. Thus coercive power could be seen to trump that gained by public display, munificence and the development of clients.²¹⁰

Patronage, then, takes its place alongside other proposed non-coercive bases of Imperial authority, being, in reality, suffused with coercion. Louis Althusser, consciously building on the ideas of fellow-Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, positioned all these elements in a theoretical framework. He identified a sharper division between what he termed the ‘Repressive State Apparatus’ (RSA) and the ‘Ideological State Apparatus’ (ISA). He located within the former all the agencies of government, administration and law enforcement, delineating within the latter those of religion, family, education and art. However, while the instruments of physical coercion are clearly available to the RSA, Althusser stressed that a repressive, coercive element was also integral to the ISA.²¹¹

²¹⁰ **Studies of patronage:** Eilers p. 1. **Patronage and exchange of goods:** Saller p. 120, 141. **Patronage as power:** Johnson and Dandeker p. 235-238; **Claudius:** Sen. Cons. Ad Polyb. 12. 3; Wallace-Hadrill (1996) p. 296. **Patronage as coercion:** Bourdieu (1972) p. 184-185; (1980) p. 125-126; Tac. *Ann.* 3. 55. 3; Braund, D. p. 150.

²¹¹ **RSA and ISA:** Althusser (1994) p. 111; (1971) p. 142-143. **Debt to Gramsci:** (1971) p. 142 n. 7; see pages 35-36.

Part Two

Roman Emperors: Military Leaders and Coercive Rulers

Part One examined aspects of the nature of coercive power in the ancient world, demonstrating the particular ways in which it was integral to the ethos of Roman political authority. Part Two will focus more closely upon the authority of Roman emperors, emphasising its military aspects. After a brief examination of other characteristics identified by the ancients as being desirable in an emperor, concentration will be on their role as military leaders and on the extent to which their supremacy depended on a personal relationship with their soldiers.

7. The Characteristics of Rulers

Introduction

In the 'disguised opening' to the second half of his *Annals*, Tacitus digressed from his narrative to apologise for the nature of the historical material he felt impelled to transmit. Explaining that there were no great wars and sieges to write about, he nevertheless suggested that it contained '...trivialities, from which the movements of great affairs spring'. Tacitus' focus here may have been mainly on literary and historiographical effect. However, to the extent that his 'apology' reflected genuine political analysis, he was also lamenting the fact that the individual proclivities and behaviours of Rome's absolute rulers were now central to the historical narrative. In the *Histories* Tacitus had already expressed his regret at the eclipse of what he held to be collective Republican government. In a passage on Galba's adoption of Piso in 68 CE, he attempted the delicate task of implicitly praising Nerva's adoption of the then current emperor, Trajan, while at the same time articulating regret that Rome had now reached a state in which it was unable to do without a dominant ruler. To this end, the historian had Galba make a long speech including the following:

“If the vast bulk of this empire could stand and keep its balance without a guiding hand, I was a suitable person to set in motion a republic. As it is, things have long ago come to such a pass that neither I in my old age can give the Roman people any better gift than a good successor, nor you in your prime anything better than a good emperor.”

Probably emanating from the very end of the fourth century, the SHA included what would have been for Tacitus depressing confirmation of this view. The biographer provided last words for Septimius Severus as he lay dying in 211 CE. Among these, referring to his sons, he said:

‘I bequeath to my two Antonini an empire which is strong, if they prove good, feeble, if they prove bad’.²¹²

The problematic relationship between the ideal ruler and the reality of individuals who wielded power had been recognised by Homer. He explored the issue in the characterisations of Agamemnon, weak and uncomfortable in his role as leader, and Achilles, too big a personality for the role assigned to him. From a different perspective, that of apparently questioning the importance of a particular ruler’s individuality and behaviour, Agamemnon was again cited by our sources. In the early fifth century CE, the Christian bishop, Synesius of Cyrene, wrote that there were local African rustics who still imagined that Agamemnon was their emperor and that Odysseus was one of his ministers. This statement has been interpreted by some as indicating both the literal remoteness of the emperor from his subjects, and the significance of general features of a ruler’s image, as opposed to the reality of his person and actions. Others have recognised the elitist humour in Synesius’ comment about provincial isolation from events surrounding the emperor’s court. However, there can be no doubt about the importance of the personality and behaviour of particular emperors, as influencing both the events of their reigns and in shaping the gradually evolving expectations of the role; sentiments that Synesius, the author of an *On Kingship*, must have shared.²¹³

²¹² **Tacitus’ apology:** *Ann.* 4. 32. 2; Woodman p. 180ff; Clarke p. 92-93; Haynes p. 40-44. **Galba:** *Hist.* 1. 16. **SHA:** *Sev.* 23. 3; OCD3 p. 713.

²¹³ **Homer:** Redfield p. 93. **Synesius:** Lane Fox p. 48-49; Lendon (1997) p. 14, 16, 267 (who takes it very seriously indeed); Birley (1988) p. ix (who sees the joke); OCD3 p. 1463.

Before considering the characterisation of rulers in relation to their power and authority, attention must be paid to a particular feature of our ancient literary sources, that is, the use made by them of deliberate contrast. A basic element in the delineation of any ruler was the manner in which he related to predecessors and peers elsewhere. Emulations, evocations and contrasts provide a thread that runs through all sections of this thesis. It is important to note that the tendency to use and indeed create comparisons was strong enough to influence the picture provided of any particular ruler. In the course of this process certain individuals acquired established characterisations that could be deployed as part of an author's stock in trade. Dio Chrysostom deliberately evoked the example of the proverbially dissolute and indolent Sardanapallus to point up the active and responsive temperament of Alexander. The evocations and associations of such a process could take on a specifically literary form. Thus, wider elements of the influential portrait of a ruler in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* were evoked when Cicero recorded that the work was a favourite of Scipio Africanus and when Suetonius indicated Julius Caesar's reaction against certain of its details. From a more general literary perspective it is worthy of note that the influential rhetorician Isocrates paused in his account of the career of Evagoras to compare him, not only with famous predecessors, but also with 'the demigods'. Again, the description of the exploits of Evagoras and his small band of followers must have been calculated to evoke mythical heroes such as Jason. Therefore from both a literary and a historical viewpoint it must be wise to assume at least exaggeration, if not fabrication, when any two figures were described and contrasted in close proximity. One example would be the treatment of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in the SHA. There the virtues of the former and vices of the latter were surely emphasised for the literary effect of contrast. Another instance can be seen in Pliny's handling of Domitian as he described the career of Trajan. The author was vague about the years prior to his subject's adoption by Nerva in 97 CE, glossing over what was in all probability a series of distinguished military commands under Domitian. Only a hint of this appears in the *Panegyricus*, surfacing as that 'bad' emperor's jealousy and admiration, explaining his judgement that Trajan was '...worthy to conduct a series of campaigns.'²¹⁴

²¹⁴ **Sardanapallus:** Dio Chrys. *Or.* 1. 3-4. **Literary evocations:** Cicero *Q. Fr.* 1. 1. 8; Suetonius *Iul.* 87; Dvornik p. 462-463. **Comparison:** Isoc. *Evag.* 33 ff and 70; **Jason**, *ibid* 28-29. An element in the influence of Isocrates is reflected in his claim (*ibid* 8) to have composed the first prose encomium of a

In addition to the actions or personas of emperors, it will be as well to outline certain external or ascribed features that had a bearing on any individual's authority. As will become clear, in our ancient sources few if any of these could be said to be fixed, in the sense that their presence or absence was always deemed to be a positive or negative signal of suitability to rule; rather, the value placed on particular characteristics tended to shift in line with the over-all assessment of an individual. Far from being objective criteria, the attributed features related to posthumous reputation and to the cultural, literary and political outlook of the authors of our literary sources. Thus, they require careful interpretation. Nevertheless, examples of other elements used in descriptions of ancient rulers will provide an important context in which to view the role of military factors. Further, it will be seen that some of the more significant of these apparently non-military features were in reality closely related to a view of an emperor as an aggressive, dominant and coercive figure.

Origins, ancestry and family connections

That an individual's merits or gifts could be connected to ancestry and family origins was deeply embedded in classical culture. Above all and with perhaps surprising persistence the idea reflected the mythic relationship between men and gods. Prominent in the senses both of his qualities and pervasiveness was the figure of Herakles, whose iconic dominance and physical power need no elaboration. The pattern of his jointly divine and human parentage was present in Homer and widely elaborated in Greek and Roman culture. Herodotus discussed evidence for the worship of Herakles in Egypt thousands of years previously and debated the connection between his divine status and heroic deeds. Rulers such as Pisistratus and the Argead Macedonian kings claimed him as an ancestor and/or evoked him as a source of authority. In the former instance the desired link was straightforwardly between the hero, his protecting goddess, Athena, and the city. With this background, it is unsurprising that Hercules was used by a number of Roman emperors in their ideology and imagery. Trajan's origins in Baetica perhaps provided a special connection in relation to the hero's labour of driving the cattle of Geryon from that area to Italy. Both Pliny and Dio Chrysostom apply positive characteristics of the Herculean myth to the

ruler. **Marcus and Verus:** Birley (1987) p. 158. **Trajan and Domitian:** Plin. *Pan.* 7-8, 14. 5; Bennett p. 43-45; Eck (2002) p. 213-215..

Emperor, while one of the two new legions raised for the second Dacian war was given the hero's sign as its standard. In accounts of 'bad' emperors, the evocation of Hercules could be given violent and megalomaniac colouring. In a catalogue of Commodus' self-glorifying excesses, Cassius Dio recorded 'The Roman Hercules' as one of the titles he assumed. That emperor was the first to employ imagery of Hercules on his coins in a systematic manner, while, 'Vast numbers of statues were erected representing him in the garb of Herakles'. The SHA chose to relate the association of Commodus and Hercules to the former's predilection for the slaughter of beasts in the amphitheatre.²¹⁵

A distinguished family background and high status origins were clearly not necessary qualifications to be a legitimate and successful ruler. For Plutarch, the alien origins and doubtful family connections of Themistocles were features that made his achievements all the more worthy of note:

'In the case of Themistocles his family was too obscure to have lent him any distinction at the beginning of his career.'

However, such instances were perhaps the exceptions that proved the rule. More typically, in the context of third century CE Rome, Maximinus could be portrayed as going to extreme lengths to camouflage his notoriously 'half-barbarian' family origins in rural Thrace. He dismissed, banished or murdered the courtiers and servants of the previous regime because

'...he wanted no one around him who was superior to him in birth...to whom he must defer'.²¹⁶

Age

As a feature relevant to the legitimacy and authority of a ruler, age could be a tricky element to handle. Coin obverses of different Hellenistic kings show them as considerably younger and older than must have been the case. For example, Ptolemy V Epiphanes, on succeeding to the throne when a child aged about five, is portrayed as a young man of perhaps twenty. Images of Mithridates VI Eupator always appear to

²¹⁵ **Pisistratus:** Boardman (1989) p. 158-159. **Macedonia:** Hammond and Griffith p. 2, 16f and 31f. **Baetica and legionary standard:** Bennett p. 72; Plin. *Pan.* 14. 5; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 1. 84. **Herakles as man/god:** *Il.* 14. 323; Eur. *Herakl.*; Plaut. *Amph.*; Hdt. 2. 43-45. **Domitian:** Cass. Dio 73. 15. 2-6; SHA *Comm.* 8. 5; Burnett p. 77.

²¹⁶ **Themistocles:** Plut. *Them.* 1. **Maximinus' origins:** Herodian 6. 8. 1. **His response:** *ibid.* 7. 1. 2-3.

reduce his true age, while those of Ptolemy I Soter seem to do the opposite. In terms of general culture, the positive aspects of youth (as suggestive of vigour and the absence of infirmity) were frequently evoked and depicted (**Plate 10**). The career of Alexander the Great would always ensure that the success and dominance of a young man could never be discounted. However, the task of ruling was routinely viewed as requiring experience and maturity. Plato had endorsed this view and, although the rules were often flouted, the Roman *cursus honorum* included minimum age requirements for its ascending levels. In the prefatory remarks to his history of sixty years of Roman Imperial rulers, Herodian stated the issue in unequivocal terms. In doing so, he also drew attention to the Roman reverence for tradition:

The emperors who were advanced in years governed themselves and their subjects commendably, because of their greater practical experience, but the younger emperors lived recklessly and introduced many innovations’.

To underline the point, he reviewed the catalogue of problems into which a variety of youthful rulers had been drawn. In the context of Marcus Aurelius’ apprehensive musings on the prospects for the reign of his undisciplined son, the licentiousness of Dionysus of Sicily, the divine pretensions of Antigonos and the incest of Ptolemy were all listed, in addition to the matricide of Nero and savagery of Domitian.²¹⁷

Images of youthful emperors such as Nero and Gallienus demonstrated a deliberate attempt to show them as more mature (**Plate 16**). At the other end of the scale, a significant element in the careful manipulation of the image of Augustus was an apparent arresting of the aging process around the time he acquired his new name. The relatively hard, bony representations of Octavian are replaced after 27 BCE by classically idealized portraits, presumably expressive of the now dominant *auctoritas* claimed in *Res Gestae* 34. 3. The persistence of these features in subsequent images underlined the ideology of timeless stability central to Augustan ideology (**Plate 11**). Nevertheless, it is possible that advancing age could be utilised even by the first *princeps*. The prominent employment of elephants in the decoration of the Temple of Concord, dedicated in 10 CE, may have reflected Augustus’s then 72 years. The Roman view of those beasts included supposed veneration of their elders and a natural

²¹⁷ **Hellenistic kings:** Smith (1988) p. 47. **The mature should rule:** Pl. *Resp.* 412b-c; OCD3 p. 415. **Aged/Youthful rulers:** Herodian 1. 1. 6, 1. 3. 2-4.



(i) Nero



(ii) Gallienus

lifespan of 200-300 years! The political realities of Marcus Aurelius' forty year exposure in the Imperial spotlight, allied to his personal ideology, resulted in the production of a series of portraits clearly reflecting the development of his official career; these ranged from the youthful heir of Antoninus Pius to care-worn philosopher/ruler (**Plate 17**). As we will see, expected elements of good physique were positive qualities in a ruler. However, Pliny the Younger, admittedly in an overtly laudatory context, found merit even in Trajan's receding hairline:

‘...the premature signs of advancing age with which the gods have seen fit to mark his hair and so enhance his look of majesty.’

It is noteworthy that this aspect of Trajan's appearance was carefully concealed in publicly visible images (**Plate 18 i**).²¹⁸

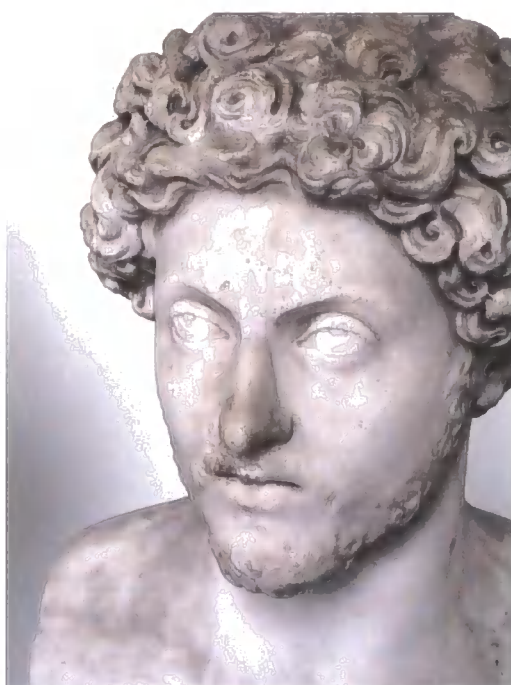
Physical appearance

The idea of interpreting features of the body, reading ethical values from physical appearance, can be traced to accounts of Mesopotamian divination from the middle of the second millennium BCE. By the late fourth century BCE the Greeks had developed a science and literature of physiognomy. However, its application was far from straightforward; examples of descriptions and attributes given different assessments in different contexts are not hard to find. For Homer, physical beauty was misleading and shallow in the case of Paris, but indicative of shining merit in Achilles. Nevertheless, as just illustrated by Pliny's view of Trajan, for the Romans, power and authority could be correlated with physical appearance. A physical description formed an element in each of Suetonius' accounts of twelve Caesars. With the exception of *Titus*, perhaps because it was so short, this had a specific place towards the end of the biography as part of the general summary of the particular ruler's character. Some association between outer and inner merit was a feature of Suetonius' method, a connection explicitly indicated more than once. Having described Otho's noble suicide, he began his summary by saying that the Emperor's '...appearance and manner did not suggest a spirit of such greatness.' As for Titus, 'His qualities of mind and body at once stood out.' Suetonius' Claudius provided interesting complexity. Possibly related to a condition such as cerebral palsy, the tradition of his misshapen body was strong. With satirical cruelty, Seneca described a 'shape of unprecedented kind' and 'unusual gait'.

²¹⁸ **Augustan agelessness:** Zanker (1988) p. 98-100; Smith (1988) p. 137-138. **Elephants:** Kellum p. 226; Pliny *Naturalis Historia* 8. 28. **Marcus Aurelius:** Birley (1987) p. 8. **Trajan:** Plin. *Pan.* 4. 7.



(i)



(ii)



(iii)

Suetonius provided documentary evidence in letters of Augustus that described Claudius as ‘lacking and impaired in the wholeness both of his mind and of his body’. However, these letters also included the view that

‘...in important matters, when his mind doesn’t wander, his nobility of character is clear enough.’

In this context, the biographer’s summary attempted to strike a balance:

‘His appearance was not lacking in authority and dignity...his face was handsome, as was his white hair...when he started to walk, his rather feeble knees would fail him and he had numerous undignified characteristics..’

The positive elements of this description are clearly evident in representations such as the statue of Claudius as Jupiter (**Plate 18 ii**). It has been suggested that, beyond the satire, the elements of ugliness and lack of self-control in Seneca’s portrait of Claudius related directly to political and ethical failings. The contrast with Nero’s physical beauty in the same work and the self-moderation of the good ruler in *De Clementia* illustrates the point. Besides its general association with merit, physical attractiveness could be portrayed in relation to specific ancestral links, even to the divine. In a passage supporting claims to descent from Venus, Julius Caesar was said to have ‘...surpassed all his fellow-citizens in beauty of person.’ Further aspects of Pliny’s praise of Trajan linked his authority to his physical appearance. In the panegyrist’s description of the modest manner of the Emperor’s pedestrian entry into Rome in 99 CE, Pliny nevertheless added that, ‘You towered above us only because of your own splendid physique’. This link between height and dominance appeared as a convention on Trajan’s Column and in representations of other emperors (**Plate 19**). Even barbarian kings, such as those of the Gauls, could be described as standing out from the rest by virtue of their size.²¹⁹

The character of ‘bad’ emperors was often represented in their physical appearance. For Suetonius, there appeared to be no positive aspects in the descriptions of Galba and Vitellius, and those of the author’s particularly ‘bad’ emperors, Caligula, Nero and

²¹⁹ **Early physiognomy:** OCD3 p. 1181; Smith (1988) p. 50. **Homer:** *Il.* 3. 54-55, 22. 26. **Suetonius:** *Otho* 12; *Titus* 3. **Description of Claudius:** OCD3 p. 337; *Sen. Apocol.* 5. 3. **Augustus’s letters:** *Claud.* 4. **Suetonius’s summary:** *Claud.* 30. **Politics and ethics:** Braund and James p. 308. **Nero and Claudius:** *Apocol.* 4. 1; *Clem.* 2. 3. 1. **Julius Caesar:** *Vell. Pat.* 2. 41. 1. **Height:** *Plin. Pan.* 22. 2; *Plut. Marc.* 7.



(i) Trajan's receding hairline concealed



ii Claudius as Jupiter



(i) Trajan's Column



(ii) Trajan's Column



(iii) Trajan's Column



(iv) Septimius Severus with his sons and Senators

Domitian, were all predominantly negative. The ‘fearful monster’, Domitian, was described by Pliny as ‘...dreadful to see and to meet, with...a womanish pallor spread over his body’. In a typically more lurid style, the SHA dwelt on details of the disease and physical deformities suffered by Commodus. In terms of dress and adornment, the lavishly eastern presentation chosen by Macrinus and by Elagabalus was said to have scandalised both elite Roman society and the troops. It was cited as an element in the downfall of both emperors.²²⁰

Education and advice

The education and advice available to and used by a ruler bridged a space between what might be seen as his external and intrinsic personal qualities on the one hand, and his behaviour and public actions on the other. In addition to the usual literary links between the Greek and Roman worlds, the subject illustrates a degree of cultural continuity in terms of the practical advice accessible to a leader. The privileged counsellors (*hetairoi*) loosely grouped around the Macedonian kings were mirrored by their Hellenistic counterparts (*philoï*), who in turn bore resemblance to the *consilium* of Roman Republican dignitaries and emperors. As to literature, at the head of a well established genre on the instruction of princes, Homer had Agamemnon explicitly and publicly acknowledge the value of Nestor’s advice, while Hesiod openly lectured those in authority about acceptable behaviour. Isocrates stressed the importance to a ruler of good counsel and gave the practical advice to, ‘Associate with the wisest of your advisers, and send for any others you can’. Evagoras, another paradigm of Isocrates’ best rulers, ‘...required no advisers and instead advised his friends.’ It is noteworthy that he was portrayed as a ‘thinker’, perhaps in response to Plato’s ideas of a philosopher-king, therefore transcending the need for counsel.²²¹

Alongside the works of Isocrates, as being very influential in antiquity, Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* fulfilled to an extent its title promise by giving a prominent role to the education of the young Cyrus. The main theme of this process was the combined

²²⁰ **Suetonius’ ‘bad’ emperors:** *Galba* 21; *Vitellius* 17; *Caligula* 50; *Nero* 51; *Domitian* 18. **Pliny:** *Pan.* 47. 3-48. 4. **Commodus:** *SHA Comm.* 13. 1-3. **Macrinus:** *Herodian.* 5. 2. 4-5. **Elagabalus:** *ibid.* 5. 8. 1-2.

²²¹ **Cultural continuity:** Lund p. 178-179. **Instruction of princes:** Martin p. 32-33. **Agamemnon:** *Il.* 2. 372. **Hesiod:** ‘...you princes...make straight your judgements, you who devour bribes put crooked judgements altogether from your thoughts’ *Op.* 261-263. **Importance:** *Ad Nic.* 27-28 and 13. **Evagoras:** *Evag.* 44, 41-42. **Isocrates and Plato:** *OCD3* p. 771.

efficacy of Cyrus' innate virtue and Spartan-style upbringing until the age of about twelve. Between them, these features produced a young man capable of lecturing his grandfather, the Median king, Astyages, on the superiority of a lifestyle without luxury, although there were hints that Cyrus was not immune to the attractions of adornment and glamour. In an echo of one of Herodotus' main themes, Isocrates in the 370s BCE added detail to what he saw as the particular difficulty of education and advice for a ruler once he was in power. After outlining various sources from which 'ordinary citizens' might learn proper behaviour, he stated that

'...the situation of monarchs, who need education more than others, is very different. When they come to power they are never admonished. This is because most men do not come near them, while those who do spend time with them do so to gain favour'.

Also writing in the first half of the fourth century BCE, Xenophon had alluded to the same problem, although this time from the point of view of the tyrant. In a dialogue format he indicated that such a ruler could gain no pleasure or true benefit from anything said to him, since he knew all would be flattery, concealing genuine feelings and opinions.²²²

Among Roman emperors, illustrations of the problem outlined by Isocrates were well documented. Suetonius provided an inventively grim illustration of Domitian's self-imposed isolation at the beginning of his principate, describing the emperor spending

'...hours every day closeted on his own, occupied with nothing other than catching flies and impaling them with a very sharp writing implement.'

It is unfortunate that the only surviving literary account detailing the various contributions made to an Imperial *consilium* is of a decidedly satirical nature (see pages 138-139). It concerned Domitian's demand for advice, not about 'trouble across the Rhine' or '...panic-stricken dispatches...pouring in from all parts of the Empire', but about how to cook a giant turbot! Juvenal stressed the advisers' flattering responses, as they 'quailed beneath the Emperor's hatred'. Historical accounts of

²²² **Influence:** OCD3 p. 1630. **Didactic purpose:** Xen. *Cyr.* 1. 1. 6. **'Spartan' education:** ibid. 1. 2. 3-16. **Innate virtue:** ibid. 1. 4. 16. **Median glamour:** ibid. 1. 3. 2. **Difficulties:** Hdt. 1. 30-33; Isoc. *Ad Nic.* 4; Xen. *Hier.* 1. 15.

Commodus were routinely introduced by recording that emperor's rejection of the advisers appointed by his father. Instead he became

‘...the slave of his companions, and it was through them that he at first, out of ignorance, missed the better life and then was led on into lustful and cruel habits.’

Of all the emperors, perhaps Caracalla was characterised as being the least open to advice. Significantly for this thesis, Cassius Dio expressed the trait plainly in terms of personal power:

‘...he clung to his own opinions; for he wished not only to know everything but to be the only one to know everything, and he desired not only to have all power but to be the only one to have power’.²²³

Nevertheless, the formal education of future emperors was a frequent topic for biographers, and Roman magistrates had always exercised the right to seek advice from their chosen *consilium*. Such education may not always have been successful and advisers, as indicated above, may have led some emperors astray. Other emperors, however, were seen as being open to and as benefiting from good advice. Although Suetonius could not resist the introduction of an ominous portent when recording the beginnings of Nero's education by Seneca, Tacitus was fulsome in his praise of its effects and of the continued influence of the philosopher and of the soldier, Burrus, on the Emperor's early years. The SHA included an unusual amount of detail about the advisers of Alexander Severus. We are told that he relied on a semi-formal council of

‘...twenty of the most learned jurists and at least fifty men of wisdom who were also skilled in speaking’.

The potential for specialization within such a system was suggested by the further information that, whereas these advisers were used for ‘...matters of law or public business,’ Alexander consulted veteran soldiers and historians on the practicalities and precedents of military campaigns. Although the SHA's *Alexander Severus* has been considered to be one of the more unreliable biographies in a generally unreliable work,

²²³ **Domitian:** Suet. *Dom.* 3; Juv. 4. 37ff; Eck (2000) p. 196-197. **Commodus:** Cass. Dio 73. 1; Herodian 1. 8. 1-2. **Caracalla:** Cass. Dio 77. 11. 5.

details such as those above do at least suggest what may have been plausible ‘facts’ to its late fourth century audience.²²⁴

Some of our most direct evidence for Roman Imperial education and advice derives from Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. No less than eighteen teachers of the former were noted in the SHA, with the Emperor himself acknowledging nine or ten of these. The tutor appointed to oversee the education of the young princes, M. Cornelius Fronto, continued a substantial and informative correspondence with both his former charges until his death about five years into their joint reign. Much of the content of these letters, especially in the early years, concerned questions about rhetoric and the most appropriate use of language. This underlined the general importance of these matters in classical education and was in line with Isocrates’ advice to a ruler. He had indicated that the importance of rhetoric went much further than establishing correct linguistic usage:

‘Practise speaking about fine pursuits, so that your thoughts may be conditioned to resemble your words’.

Reflecting this idea, there was an undercurrent running through Fronto’s concern with rhetoric, linking it vitally with good government. Much of his later correspondence with the two emperors appeared to be of a supportive and even consolatory nature, rather than giving advice or instruction. In the context of a defeat in Armenia in 162, he reminded Marcus that Rome had not always been successful and recalled Herodotus’ account of Polycrates of Samos. He was deemed to have been too fortunate in his undertakings and therefore destined to end badly. Elsewhere Fronto urged Marcus to rest from his exertions, while at the same time bolstering the status of the Emperor’s defence of the frontiers. He reminded Marcus that even emperors ‘...who enlarged the state and empire of Rome with huge additions’ also took their ease. Care may be required here not to over interpret the political importance of this private correspondence. It seems likely that the raising of two new legions in 170 followed the traditional purpose of such recruitment in being the prelude to a planned campaign of expansion, in this case across the Danube.²²⁵

²²⁴ **Frequent topic:** Suet. *Aug.* 89; *Claud.* 2-3; *Tit.* 2; SHA *Hadr.* 1.5 and *Sev.* 1.4. **Magistrates:** OCD3 p. 377. **Unsuccessful education:** SHA *Comm.* 1. 7. **Portent:** Suet. *Ner.* 7. **Praise:** Tac. *Ann.* 13. 2. 1. **Severus Alexander:** SHA *Alex. Sev.* 16. 1-16. 3. **Unreliability:** for example, Syme (1983) p. 214-215.

²²⁵ **Eighteen teachers:** Champlin p. 118. **Acknowledgements:** M. *Aur. Med.* 1. 5-15. **Isocrates and rhetoric:** Isoc. *Ad Nic.* 38 and *Nic.* 9. **Good government:** Champlin p. 128. **Lack of success:** Fronto *On*

Virtues and personal behaviour

It was only natural that the behaviour of rulers, their observed actions and resultant ascribed character traits, should be given extensive treatment by our ancient sources. To a significant extent the scale of this treatment reflected the fact that the power and authority of rulers such as Roman emperors depended on, and/or dictated, the belief of their subjects that they, as all-powerful rulers, possessed features and qualities that necessarily surpassed those of 'ordinary' individuals. In his important 1981 study, *The Emperor and his Virtues*, Wallace-Hadrill correctly related this phenomenon to Max Weber's concept of charismatic authority (see pages 6-7). As we have seen in chapter three, Weber identified physical coercion as the essential key to political power (see page 33), and Wallace-Hadrill's analysis of Imperial virtues showed them to be essentially misleading and 'chimerical', if viewed as foci of effective authority.²²⁶

It is also the case that the accounts given by our ancient sources of the virtues and behaviour of rulers can be difficult to interpret, and may underplay or leave unstated the coercive bases of political power. Xenophon's characterisation of Cyrus illustrated the point. Modern tradition has tended to take the preponderance of positive comments in the work to represent a ringing endorsement of the Persian monarch as a model of the virtuous and successful ruler. From this it has been assumed that Xenophon was associating these two features in a necessary relationship. Diodorus Siculus certainly made this connection in his praise of Egyptian rulers. Their personal orderliness and restraint, he said, led to those features being prominent in their government and to success in war. There is no doubt that in the *Cyropaedia* the king is lavishly praised for his demonstration of good qualities. Among many possible examples, he admired and pitied brave but defeated opponents, was pious towards the gods, acted with modesty and restraint, and cared for the needs of his soldiers. However, in each of these instances Cyrus was shown to be motivated by calculation of the wider, long term advantages to the achievement or security of his power. Indeed, in the central instance of justice (one of Dio Chrysostom's 'pre-eminently kingly virtues') Cyrus was depicted as lecturing his companions about the advantages of merely 'appearing to be just'. The importance to Cyrus of appearances extended even to such details as

the Parthian War 2-4 (Loeb Vol. II p. 21-23); Hdt. 3. 39-43, 124-125. **Rest and planned expansion:** Fronton De Fer. Als. 4 (Loeb Vol. II p. 9); Birley (1987) p. 142, 163.

²²⁶ **Charismatic authority:** Wallace-Hadrill (1981) p. 298; Weber (1968) p. 956ff, 1111ff. **Power as essentially coercive:** Weber (1948) p. 78. **Virtues as chimeras:** Wallace-Hadrill (1981) p. 317-318.

ensuring that he always looked taller than his chariot driver 'either really or in some other way.'²²⁷

That Xenophon should in fact have depicted Cyrus as adopting an instrumental approach to virtue should not surprise us. At the outset the author had announced the subject of his work to be a reflection on the difficulty of one human being achieving and maintaining power over others. Thus, if Cyrus was put forward as an example of a good king, it was in the sense of good as meaning 'successful' or 'skilful' (as in 'a good footballer'), not as being a model monarch in respect of his virtue. The picture given of Cyrus at the apogee of his power is clearly that of an oriental despot. All must prostrate themselves before him and he was punctilious about the protocol of public appearances. His desire for money was insatiable, although this too was merely the instrument towards greater and more secure power. Even in relation to Cyrus' success in the task of ruling, Xenophon's account was ultimately far from clear cut. The final chapter recorded the crumbling of Cyrus' empire after his death and deterioration in the quality of subsequent regimes. It must be added that the cogency of Xenophon's arguments on this matter is possibly brought into question elsewhere; his claims that the virtues of Agesilaus qualified him to rule and that the fact that he was accepted as ruler confirmed his virtue appear distinctly circular.²²⁸

The negative character of Xenophon's conclusion on Cyrus struck many commentators as so out of kilter with his supposedly adulatory view of the King that they incorrectly suggested that it is an inauthentic addition to the work. However, in reality the conclusion underlines the complexity of the account in the *Cyropaedia*, and thus forms a salutary example of the care required when interpreting views expressed in our ancient sources about the supposed virtues and behaviour of rulers. In fact the overwhelming feature of Cyrus' success outlined by Xenophon was the Persian ruler's military prowess. The theme of his victories in battle punctuated the account and formed the subject matter of the historian's concluding appraisal. Thus is reinforced the central position of military power in Xenophon's attempt to address the questions

²²⁷ **Xenophon, virtue and success:** Anderson (1974) p. 73; Gera p. 280-285; Ambler p. 10 n. 6. **Egypt:** Diod. Sic. 1. 71. 1-5. **Opponents:** 7. 1. 41. **Piety:** 1. 6. 3. **Modesty:** 8. 1. 30-32. **Soldiers:** 5. 5. 41. **'Kingly virtues':** Dio Chrys. *Or.* 2. 54. **Justice:** 4. 2. 42. **Appearances:** 8. 3. 14.

²²⁸ **Xenophon's aim:** 1. 1. 1-2. **A good 'ruler':** 'So on the grounds that this man was worthy of wonder...he so excelled in ruling human beings' (1. 1. 6). **Prostration:** 8. 3. 14. **Protocol:** 8. 4. 3; **Money/power:** 8. 2. 20-22. **Aftermath:** 8. 8. **Circularity:** *Ages.* 5.

with which this thesis opened. Such an evaluation is consonant with Wallace-Hadrill's assessment that it was concern about the coercive nature of Imperial authority that actually underpinned overt discussion about the virtues of Roman emperors.²²⁹

Public actions: *Civilitas* - the circus and the theatre

This apprehension among the Roman elite about the potential threat of an emperor's power found expression in the virtues regularly ascribed to the ideal holder of that position. Restraint and deference to the weaker position of senators and other members of the population were often prominent. Of these valued qualities, perhaps that of *civilitas* serves as a representative example. In its two broad meanings ('the art of government' and 'politeness, courteousness, affability') the concept neatly brought together what was looked for in an Imperial ruler, this in spite of or perhaps, more likely, because of their effective monopoly of control over military force and its use for political coercion. A significant manifestation of *civilitas* had been the Augustan self-identification as *princeps*, with its implication of ruling as first citizen among equals. For Romans, the potency of this unofficial nomenclature lay in the deliberate distinction between it and a contrasting ethos based on the ruler as *dominus*. The latter term encompassed the negative meanings of 'master', 'lord' and even 'owner'. It had overtones of the perceived despotic rule of Asiatic kings, who were viewed as possessing their subjects as slaves. By contrast, the idea of the emperor as *princeps* emphasised the positive features of *civilitas*: rule over free men; restraint in the exercise of power; taking pleasure in everyday pursuits; essentially being 'one of us'. Suetonius ascribed the quality of *civilitas* to Augustus himself in relation to his clemency and restraint in pursuing opponents, and to Claudius when describing his moderation in accepting honours and his claims to 'unassuming manners'. Significantly, in a later usage relating to Titus, the term was employed with direct reference to an absence of political coercion:

'At Rome he displayed such great graciousness (*civilitas*) during his reign that he punished no one at all, dismissed those convicted of

²²⁹ **Xenophon's conclusion:** See Gera p. 299-300 for discussion of the problems here. **Cyrus and battle:** for example *Cyr.* 3. 3. 61-63, 5. 3. 51-59, 6. 1. 25-30, 7. 1. 1-49. **Concluding assessment:** 8. 8. 20-27. **Concern about coercion:** Wallace-Hadrill (1981) p. 314-317.

conspiracy against him and treated them with the same intimacy as before'.²³⁰

Vespasian received favourable comments because of his accessibility, good humour and lack of affectation. Nowhere was this characterisation of a *princeps* more to the fore than in Pliny's praise of Trajan. Having already described the soldiers' admiration won by the *princeps* through his sharing their hardships, Pliny used his account of Trajan's return to Rome as ruler in 99 CE to emphasise *civilitas* as a welcome and essential quality. The new emperor walked into Rome, unlike predecessors who had been '...lifted up on human shoulders in their overbearing pride.' All sections of society were said to have rejoiced at the sight. Pliny made a point of describing Trajan's personal and physical greetings to senators, *equites* and clients. The Emperor even allowed himself to be '...jostled as one of the people' as he pressed through the crowd. No group of favourites monopolised the new ruler's attention. Encapsulating the *civilitas* of the occasion, Pliny stated that, 'On that very first day you made yourself accessible to all'. Cassius Dio provided a similar portrayal of Trajan, although he also noted that too great an accessibility could put an emperor at risk of assassination.²³¹

In their relationship with the population of Rome, the emperors' attendance at the theatre, games and circus provided a significant opportunity for the manifestation of *civilitas*. Augustus had set the pattern. In line with his careful approach to such matters, the first *princeps* did not overlook the importance of these gatherings for personal and dynastic display, rooted as they were in the social and religious fabric of the community. The scale and grandeur of the spectacles he provided for the Roman populace were included in the self-advertisement of his achievements, being given a prominent place within the statement of his religious benefactions. Suetonius noted the contrast between the ostentatiously inattentive behaviour of Julius Caesar at the games and Augustus' presumably equally calculated interested involvement in the proceedings. The author also commented on the latter's use of these occasions to promote his desired pattern of social hierarchy and control. However, there is abundant evidence to demonstrate that

²³⁰ **Virtues of restraint:** Wallace-Hadrill (1981) p. 316, 312 n. 67. **Civilitas:** Lewis and Short p. 346. **Princeps and civilitas:** OCD³ p. 1246; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 9. 4; *ibid.* 3. 28. 2; RG 34. 3; Cameron p. 175; Suet. *Aug* 51; *Claud.* 12, 35. **Titus:** Eutr. 7. 21.

²³¹ **Vespasian:** Cass. Dio 66. 10. 3b-12; Suet. *Vesp.* 21. **Trajan and Soldiers:** Plin. *Pan.* 13. 1. **Return to Rome:** *ibid.* 22-24. **Predecessors:** for example, Vitellius (Tac. *Hist.* 2. 87-89). **Cassius Dio:** 68. 7. 3, 11. 3.

the opportunity for communication provided by mass entertainments was not one-way. There are sufficient indications from sources such as Cicero to suggest that it was not exceptional for the audience of Roman mass entertainments to use such gatherings for the expression of public sentiments on political and other matters. As the rule of the emperors steadily reduced other opportunities, ‘...the Imperial theatre became the primary and final scene of mass expression.’ Further, it is clear that the response of an emperor to unwelcome expressions of opinion at these gatherings could result in his repressive employment of the military. Before leaving the topic of *civilitas* as a desired quality of emperors, it is worth noting that the exercise of this virtue did not provide a sufficient qualification for the role. The focus of this thesis on the coercive nature of Imperial authority is supported by Herodian’s contrast between the behaviour of the brothers Geta and Caracalla. While the former was described as going out of his way to be open and friendly, it was the latter, ‘...harsh and savage in everything that he did’, who attained the throne.²³²

Building

As an activity of Roman emperors, building was discussed to some degree by all the ancient historians and biographers. It provides a useful focus for this thesis as, both in its intention and later interpretation, the construction of cities and their grand edifices was clearly related to the psychology of domination and display so important to the authority of rulers. Perhaps reflecting general thematic context, the *Iliad* had concentrated more on the destruction of buildings than their erection and the *Odyssey* introduced its hero as a man ‘...who had sacked the sacred town of Troy’. However, in discussing the Samians, Herodotus clearly equated the importance of a people with the scale of their building and engineering achievements. He confirmed this perspective by reference to the insignificance of Egyptian monarchs who left no monuments. Echoing expressed hopes for his own fame in posterity stemming from writing, Thucydides had Pericles proclaim in the funeral oration:

‘Mighty indeed are the marks and monuments of our empire which we have left. Future ages will wonder at us, as the present age wonders now.’

²³² **Theatre:** Rowe, G. p. 97; **Augustus:** RG 22-23; Suet. *Aug.* 43-45. **Cicero:** *Sest* 106; **Cameron** p. 158. **Geta and Caracalla:** Herodian 4. 3. 2-4.

Such assessments must be put in the stern context of comments on the realities of power. Thucydides reflected that the buildings of Athens and Sparta would give a misleading impression of the relative strength of the two cities, in the former case prompting an overestimate and in the latter an underestimate:

‘We have no right, therefore, to judge cities by their appearances rather than by their actual power’.²³³

Nevertheless, building activity played a significant role in the mythology of heroes and rulers. All Greek cities and colonies had at least one foundation myth. Invariably these involved figures of authority and political power, usually with divine aspects. The significance, particularly in the sphere of religion, of such *oikists* has been well established. Alexander the Great must have added hugely to the potential status and glamour to be obtained by any later ruler who built extensively. Plutarch suggested that he founded seventy Alexandrias during his conquests, although twenty is perhaps a more realistic number. The size and importance of Egyptian Alexandria, alongside the King’s personal involvement in its foundation, certainly shaped the behaviour of his successors. The *diadochoi* founded numerous cities, which they named after themselves or members of their families. Nor could Alexander’s example have failed to leave an impression on Roman emperors, many of whom openly evoked the reputation of the Macedonian in their ideology. The traditionally high status of royal building as an activity in itself and as a symbol of legitimate rule can also be recognized in Alexander’s eastern operations. There was nothing arbitrary in the fact that his first recorded decision on coming into possession of Babylon was to initiate restoration work on temples destroyed by his ‘predecessor’, Xerxes. In a similar context, Cyrus had acted in the same way, himself reflecting the actions of even more ancient Assyrian conquerors.²³⁴

In the shadow of Cicero’s statement that, ‘The very wages of a labourer are the badges of slavery’, both Nero and Vespasian were portrayed as participants in the manual work

²³³ **Samians:** Hdt. 3. 60. **Egypt:** ibid. 2. 101. **Pericles:** Thuc. 1. 22, 2. 41. **Athens and Sparta:** ibid. 1. 10.

²³⁴ **Foundation myths:** Notably celebrated in the Odes of Pindar, for example, Tlepolemus and Rhodes (*Ol.* 7. 20-24), Aeacus and Aegina (*Ol.* 8. 29-37), Battos and Cyrene (*Pyth.* 4. 1-8). **Oikists:** Malkin (1987). **Seventy:** Plut. *De Alex. fort.* 1. 5. **Twenty:** Walbank (1992) p. 43. **Egyptian Alexandria:** Arr. *Anab.* 3. 1. **Diadochoi:** Lund p. 174f. **Alexander:** Arr. *Anab.* 3. 16. **Cyrus and Assyrians:** Kuhrt p. 49; Pritchard p. 316.

of their building projects. Although he made no explicit editorial comment, Suetonius surely meant the contexts of the two Emperors' efforts, respectively a canal in Greece and the Capitol in Rome, to characterise the former as acting improperly while the latter was praised. It is worthy of note that in dealing with a similar episode, Alexander was described as closely guiding and motivating his labouring troops without actually getting his hands dirty. Nevertheless, building was a consistent focus for ancient analysis of the merits of Roman emperors. As in so many elements, Augustus was significant in establishing both the criterion and the necessary standards. His self-proclaimed achievements included an account of the building he undertook in Rome. Suetonius endorsed the *princeps*' account, adding the telling comment that previously Rome '...was not decked out in a manner fitting such a great empire'. Hadrian was responsible for numerous building restorations in Rome. In spite of his desire to 'surpass everybody in everything', he was given credit for not embellishing them with his own name. Instead the Emperor recorded the original builder. The building projects of Septimius Severus received less than fulsome praise, partly because of his insistence on usurping the place of the inscribed originator.²³⁵

Activity, tastes and pastimes

In a broad sense, a high level of purposeful activity was expected of ancient rulers. Its opposites, indolence and dalliance, were considered inappropriate. Xerxes was portrayed as being motivated to punish the Athenians in order to match the activity of predecessors stretching back for nine generations to Achaemenes himself. Herodotus' story of Atossa and Darius may put another perspective on this evidence. Her goading of her husband, the king,

'...to be seen engaged in some active enterprise, to show the Persians
that they have a man to rule them'

led directly to his disastrous attack on the Scythians. Similarly, his son Xerxes was portrayed as dismissing the cautions of Artabanus about invading Greece with a show of restless bravado:

'...profit comes to those who are willing to act ...Only by great risks
can great results be achieved.'²³⁶

²³⁵ **Labour = slavery:** Cic. *Off.* 1. 150. **Nero and Vespasian:** Suet. *Ner.* 19 and *Vesp.* 8. **Augustus:** RG 19-21; Suet. *Aug.* 28. **Hadrian:** Cass. Dio 69. 3. 3; SHA Had. 19. 9. **Severus:** Cass. Dio 77. 16. 3.

²³⁶ **Xerxes' ancestors:** Hdt. 7. 11. **Atossa and Darius:** ibid. 3. 134. **Xerxes' bravado:** ibid. 7. 47-55.

In Roman self-perception action was of greater significance than precept. In this they saw themselves in positive contrast to the Greeks. Partly demonstrating his own absorption of Roman ideals, and partly reflecting those ideals back onto his chosen patrons, Josephus illustrated the desired model in his description of the young Herod's rise to power. He was said to be 'energetic by nature' and an 'active spirit'. By contrast, his rival, Hyrcanus, was portrayed as being '...indolent and without the energy necessary to a king'. No doubt Dio Chrysostom had the same flattering intent with regard to the Romans in general, and perhaps Trajan in particular, when he noted Alexander's perception of the ruinous luxury and idleness of Persian, Scythian and Indian rulers. It was clearly seen as a bad sign that the young Commodus, on his accession to the throne, '...hated all exertion and craved the comfortable life of the city.' The SHA included the detail that he was lazy in relation to his correspondence and other official duties, whereas Cassius Dio placed the criticism directly against comments about the new emperor deserting campaigns against the barbarians. Plutarch illustrated the role of activity in the delicate balance of a leader's virtues. He recorded that the aged Agesilaus was said to have jeopardised his hard-won reputation by supporting the cause of a minor Egyptian rebel against the Persians. The Spartan king justified his actions on the ground that any activity in the service of the state was superior to idleness. However, Agesilaus did feel his honour to be slighted when the rebel made him only second in command of his army. The need for a ruler to lead through persuasion as well as activity could be decisive in particular circumstances. Thus Thucydides characterised Pericles as '...the most powerful both in action and debate.' The practical advantages of activity over sloth were frequently illustrated. The luxuriating passivity of Pescennius Niger was contrasted with the decisive action of Septimius Severus in explaining the latter's success during the civil war of 193 CE. Septimius Severus' full daily routine received positive comment, emphasised in another version of his dying words, 'Come, give it here, if we have anything to do'.²³⁷

In the attention given to the leisure pursuits of emperors and other rulers, our ancient sources drew on the philosophical/psychological idea that underlying character could

²³⁷ **Roman self perception:** Griffin (1989) p. 13; Quintilian 12. 30; Joseph. *BJ* 1. 203-204; Landau p. 243. **Alexander:** Dio Chrys. *Or.* 4. 6. **Commodus:** Cass. Dio 72. 1. 2; SHA *Comm.* 13. 7-8. **Agesilaus:** Plut. *Ages.* 36.1-37. 1-2. **Pericles:** Thuc. 1. 139. **Niger/Severus:** Herodian 2. 8. 9-10, 2. 9. 1-3, 2. 14. 5-6. **Severus' routine:** Cass. Dio 77. 17. 4.

be revealed in the actions of unguarded moments. Pliny the Younger expressed this clearly and in a manner that indicated the supposed profundity of the idea:

‘For it is a man’s pleasures (yes, his pleasures) which tell us most about his true worth, his moral excellence, and his self-control.’

Without doubt, war and the preparation for war were the most straightforwardly acceptable activities for a ruler. Plutarch contrasted the warlike ‘kingly’ pursuits of Demetrius with rulers who used to spend their leisure time ‘...making little tables or lamp-stands’ and growing poisonous plants. Fighting and associated activities had their roots in the concept of the king as saviour of his people, protecting it from dangers. With reference to slaying dragons and wild beasts, this idea was prominent in the early Egyptian, Assyrian and Persian monarchies, although in the last of these instances the concept of saviour later centred on the more strictly religious figure of Zoroaster. It is clear that the Persia described by Xenophon was more his own Spartan influenced construct than an accurate picture of that society. Nevertheless, even from such a perspective, his references to the important role of the monarch in hunting, and indeed the significance of the activity itself, may have echoed some element of this fundamental idea of the protection of his people. Cyrus was described as having been exceptionally keen on hunting and to have encouraged and been victorious in horse races, a related and valued Persian pastime. Contrasted with the indignity of Nero’s ‘warbling and wailing in the theatres’, hunting could be considered ‘the best recreation’ of the ‘good king’. It has been argued that Domitian made deliberate use of Hellenistic models to promote his *virtus* as a hunter. Trajan was praised for his prowess in the chase and Hadrian was said to have named a town in Bithynia *Hadrianutherae* in recognition of a successful bear hunt in the area (**Plate 20 i**). However, in the case of Lucius Verus, such activity could be viewed as a wilful distraction from proper duty. Pliny compared Trajan’s positive energy and skill in sailing with the ‘disgraceful scene’ of Domitian’s apparent fear of open water and rivers. In analysing the generally military and coercive nature of political power, the relevance of this aspect of a monarch’s role can be underlined:

‘When the essential qualification for kingship is an ability to protect the people of the state, there the army cannot be set aside’.²³⁸

²³⁸ **Pleasures = character:** Plin. *Pan.* 82. 8. **Contrast:** Plut. *Dem.* 20. 2. **King as saviour:** Kuhrt p. 53; Dvornik p. 125-127. **Sparta:** Ambler p. 5. **Hunting:** Xen. *Cyr.* 1. 2. 10, 1. 4. 4-8. **Horseracing:** *ibid.* 8. 3. 25. **Nero and ‘best recreation’:** Dio Chrys. 3. 135-136. **Domitian:** Tuck p. 221-222. **Trajan:** Plin.

By way of contrast, Marcus Aurelius was characterised as congenitally weak and ailing. Cassius Dio associated this with the Emperor's concentration on his books and in fact uses it as a further reason to praise him for his hard work and dedication to duty. The first of these points is also found in the *Historia Augusta*. Nevertheless, the Emperor must have led an active life during his prolonged spells with the army and makes brief mention of his personal wrestling coach. Perhaps indicating his close understanding of the Roman outlook, Arrian praised Alexander for acting as very much 'one of us' in the context of sharing the general hardships of a soldier's way of life. In fact he employed the point as an argument to bolster the king's faltering control over his army. That a 'good' Roman emperor was willing and able to live like a common soldier in the field was an important element in the reputations of, for example, Trajan and Hadrian. Perhaps it indicates the significance of this readiness to share the day to day experience of soldiers that it should be prominent in the portrait of even an unsuccessful contender for the throne such as Pescennius Niger. However, while Trajan could refer positively to 'my fellow soldiers' and be triumphantly portrayed in that context on his Column (**Plate 20 ii**), in a very different political context Augustus was praised for keeping his distance from the troops.²³⁹

As a final note in this section, behaviours that were usually negative could also be tolerated if seen as in some way the price that had to be paid for the positive features of a great man. The well documented complexities of character in Alexander the Great would have been foremost in this respect, while Roman examples could include Augustus' 'taste for deflowering virgins' and Vespasian's cupidity. Bad behaviour could be more acceptable if it was kept within the private sphere and did not interfere with a ruler's proper activities. Thus, Seneca and Burrus were said to have controlled Nero with a policy '...to direct his deviations from virtue into licensed channels', while the excesses of drinking and womanising indulged in by the young Demetrius were tolerated by his father because '...in time of war he was as sober as those who were abstemious by nature'.²⁴⁰

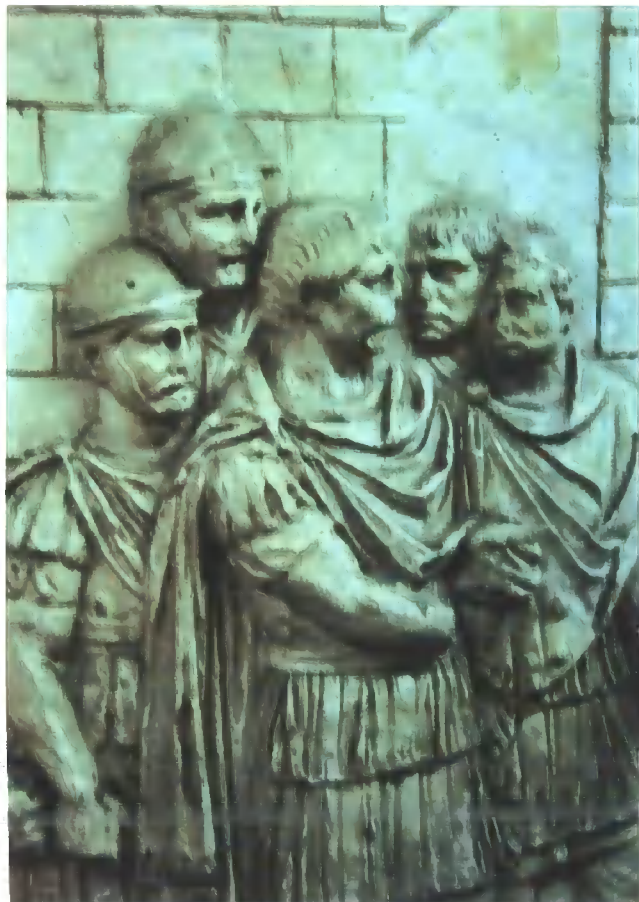
Pan. 81. 3. **Hadrian**: SHA *Had.* 20. 13. **Lucius Verus**: SHA *Marc.* 8. 14. **Sailing**: *Pan.* 81. 4-82. 4. **Army**: Thapar p. 25.

²³⁹ **Books**: Cass. Dio 71. 1. 2, 72. 36. 2. **Praise**: 72. 36. 3; SHA *Marc.* 3. 7. **Wrestling**: *Ad MC* 2. 12 = Fronto. Loeb Vol. 1. p. 151. **Alexander**: Arr. *Anab.* 2. 18 and 5. 27. **Trajan**: Plin. *Ep.* 10. 53. **Hadrian**: SHA *Had.* 10. 4. **Pescennius Niger**: SHA *Pesc. Nig.* 11. 1-3. **Augustus**: Suet. *Aug.* 25.

²⁴⁰ **Alexander**: Arr. *Anab.* 7. 29-30. **Augustus**: Suet. *Aug.* 71. **Vespasian**: Suet. *Vesp.* 16. **Nero**: Tac. *Ann.* 13. 2. 1. **Demetrius**: Plut. *Demetr.* 19. 3, 6.



(i) Arch of Constantine:
Hadrian hunting



(ii) Trajan surrounded
by his soldiers

Fighting

As a prelude to his account of Catiline, Sallust provided a brief survey of the political and moral development of Rome. He described the City's early relations with its neighbours, making the highly questionable claim that Roman military activity had initially been of a defensive nature in warding off the attacks of peoples that were jealous of Rome's prosperity. However, with the demise of the kings, Sallust identified a change in general outlook. From that time '...individuals...were able to distinguish themselves and to display their talents'. The author stated that '...the desire for glory...had possessed men's hearts'. He immediately associated this phenomenon with a willingness to take on the hardships of soldiering and the necessary competition for the highest honours. Those sought-after distinctions were integral to the political process in Rome, as illustrated by Polybius' statement that ten years of military experience were a precondition of holding any public office. True or not, this claim at least provides a potential explanation for the fact that war certainly appears to have been the normal state of affairs in Republican Rome.²⁴¹

Modern students of comparative sociology have consistently included Rome amongst the more aggressively militaristic empires. One such theorist, Anthony Giddens, used a basic observation to confirm such an assessment. He commented that the closing of the Temple of Janus, a ceremony signifying that Rome was not at war, had occurred only twice in the City's long history. While ancient historians may find their interest drawn to the erroneous numerical calculation in this statement, the fundamental meaning of both the ceremony itself and the prominence given to it in our sources is not undermined. It is of relevance here that OCD³ entry for 'Peace' provides no straightforward definition; rather it points to a series of separate entries exemplifying its manifestation in different circumstances. Note has already been made of the specific relationship between the Latin term *pax* and war (see page 105). If, then, war was ubiquitous and peace so vague a concept, how, it might be asked, can we account for our ancient sources' numerous and undoubtedly negative references to war? One answer to this question is to note that the majority of such negative statements derive from civil war rather than war in general. Thucydides' harrowing descriptions of conflict amongst the population of Corcyra in 427-424 BCE provided a model both in

²⁴¹ Early Rome: Sall : *Cat.* 6-8. War and political careers: Polyb. 6. 19. War as normal: Harris p. 9-10.

terms of the scope of historiography and the tenor of political analysis. However, the pessimistic Thucydides saw this political violence within states as an inevitable consequence of human nature driven to extremes, just as he viewed wars between states as the unavoidable result of mutual envy and fear. In Latin literature, the peculiar dangers and horrors of civil war were frequently evoked. Julius Caesar, a keen and skilled exponent of war if ever there was one, portrayed himself and was described by others as being reluctantly forced to take up arms to defend himself and his reputation. After his decisive victory at Pharsalus in 48 BCE he was said to have lamented, "They would have it so." Eutropius used the loss of life at Pharsalus to make the explicit distinction between undesirable civil war and 'proper' war against barbarians, a distinction that he underlined regarding the more nearly contemporary battle of Mursa between Constantius II and Magnentius in 351 CE:

'Vast forces of the Roman Empire were destroyed in that conflict, forces which were sufficient for any foreign wars and which might have provided many a triumph and much security.'²⁴²

The recorded careers of numerous famous Romans reflected the basically positive place of warfare in the Roman ethos. A selection of Plutarch's *Lives* exemplifies the point. The opening of his *Marcellus* could hardly have laid greater stress on the military qualities of its subject, including a claimed derivation of his name as meaning 'martial'. From the outset Cato was said to have praised his father as a 'brave man and good soldier', and to have responded to his position as a 'new man' in politics with the reflection that

'...as far as office and distinction went, he was indeed new, but having regard to ancestral deeds of valour, he was oldest of the old.'

Plutarch confirmed his subject's sense of priorities by proceeding to concentrate on his military career until explicitly acknowledging a change of topic in the opening of chapter 15. In summary, and quite possibly in order of importance, the advantages of military glory to members of the Roman elite could be said to be: the chance to demonstrate distinction; assistance in gaining political office; and the opportunity to

²⁴² **Modern theorists:** Mosca p. 54, Giddens (1985) p. 54. **Janus:** RG 13; Cass. Dio 53. 27; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 27. **OCD3** p. 793. **Peace:** **OCD3** p. 1129; Hardwick p. 335. **Corcyra:** Thuc. 3. 81-85, 4. 47-48. **Human nature:** *ibid.* 3. 82. **Envy and fear:** *ibid.* 1. 23, 36, 88, etc.; Hornblower (1991) p. 15-17. **Latin literature:** Hor. *Carm.* 2. 1. 1-8; Lucr. 3. 70-72; Prop. *Elegies* 1. 22; Lucan 1. 1-32. **Caesar's reluctance and regret:** *Caes. B Civ.* 1. 7; Plut. *Caes.* 32, 46. **'Proper' wars:** Eutr. 6. 21, 10. 12.

gain wealth from booty. Statistics can be cited in support of these desirable outcomes. During the middle Republic roughly one out of every three consuls celebrated a triumph and between 227 and 79 BCE fifteen out of nineteen praetors who were granted a triumph were successful in consular elections. When military distinction was lacking, conspicuous efforts had to be made to fill the gap. Thus, Plutarch's Brutus was a poor general, but excelled in public virtue, and private philosophical knowledge and endowment.²⁴³

Outside the elite it was equally true that, 'The love of military distinction infused Romans of every social class.' Perhaps in deliberate illustration of the extent to which military glory was embedded in the broader Roman ethos, Valerius Maximus organised his collected examples of bravery to include the actions of both the elite and the ordinary soldier. In a significant juxtaposition, Polybius outlined a constitutional role for the general population in relation both to the elite competition for honours and to the state's waging of war. In addition to the ratification of legislation, he noted that the people '...bestow offices on those who deserve them' and that they '...deliberate and decide on questions of peace and war'. The true extent of such powers may be doubted for any period, particularly after that in which Polybius was writing (the second half of the second century BCE). It has been noted that the record contains no instance of a senatorial decision to go to war being overturned by an assembly of the people. In addition the successful exploitation of military glory as the route to elected political office must indicate a widespread positive view of war.²⁴⁴

Although direct testimony from the 'ordinary' population on this matter is as scarce as that about any other topic from the ancient world, evidence can be brought to bear. Polybius is again helpful. He described the honours and attention given to soldiers who had been rewarded for valour, stressing that these men

'...enjoy great prestige in the army and soon afterwards in their homes...they are singled out for precedence in religious processions when they return.'

²⁴³ **Marcellus:** Plut. *Marc.* 1. 1-3. **Cato:** Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 1-14. **Summary of advantages:** Harris p 30-31, 26, 56. **Brutus:** Plut. *Brut.* 1. 1-2, 2. 1-2, 4. 1-2, *Synk.* 3. 2.

²⁴⁴ **War and different social groups:** Brunt (1990) p. 442; Val. Max. 3. 2. **Powers of the people:** Polyb. 6. 14. **senatorial decisions and popular opinion:** Harris p. 41-43, 263.

Polybius made a direct connection between the Roman people's '...almost obsessive concern with military rewards and punishments' and his contention that '...they emerge with brilliant success from every war in which they engage'. Livy provided a lengthy speech for a clearly non-elite soldier, Spurius Ligustinus. During the levy of 171 BCE a number of former centurions had been listed in the lower ranks because of their now advanced age. In appealing against this, Ligustinus outlined his long and distinguished career, stressing the military honours he had won and the subsequent civic recognition he had received. In view of his attested courage he was reinstated and received an official vote of thanks from the senate. During the same levy, for war in Macedonia, Livy recorded that many recruits enlisted because they had seen veterans from earlier campaigns return as rich men.²⁴⁵

There can be little doubt that during the Republic, and at least into the principate, the potential for material reward to be gained through military activity was a persistent motivator of recruitment. This, of course, reflected a perspective long established in the ancient world, for instance by Homer. The quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon about who had the right to a war prize was a major element of the *Iliad*. In relation to the main thrust of this thesis it is worth noting here that the dispute over Briseis was not expressed in terms of her intrinsic value as a prize; rather she was a symbolic focus of the personal rivalry between the two leaders and of Agamemnon's perceived need to establish his supremacy over the whole army. As he stated to Achilles:

'.....I myself
will call for Briseis at your hut, and take her,
flower of young girls that she is, your prize,
to show you here and now who is the stronger
and make the next man sick at heart – if any
think of claiming equal place with me.'

Beyond elite power struggles, the poem also recognised the legitimate interest of ordinary soldiers in booty. For example, in recalling them to the task of fighting, Nestor urged the Greeks only to delay their collection of booty. There seems to be little doubt that an expectation of economic reward was also an important recruiting agent

²⁴⁵ **War and ordinary people:** Polyb. 6. 39; Harris p. 43. **Ligustinus:** Livy 42. 32-35. **Riches as motivation:** *ibid.* 42. 32.

for the legions of Rome. It is likely that Plautus demonstrated a widespread view in representing money-making to be a consequence of Rome's wars. The slave, Sosia, proclaimed of Amphitryo, his master and general of the Theban army:

‘With booty, fields and fame he hath enriched

His fellow countrymen...’.

It is reasonable to speculate that the order in which the slave listed his master's benefactions reflected a deliberately differentiated and possibly genuine contrast between the stated priorities of non-elite as opposed to elite Romans. The latter would surely have identified fame as the primary gain. It is true that from the later Empire there are indications of attempts to avoid service in the army, for example by self-mutilation. However, over the longer span of Roman history it also seems clear that war was generally popular. Modern difficulties in accommodating this perception may well owe something to a prevailing anti-war sentiment amongst historians writing after the First and Second World Wars. Inscriptions confirming the material advantages granted to veterans can be exemplified from periods throughout the principate and Empire, including those of Augustus, Domitian and Constantine. Only the last of these rulers listed merely material provision, such as exemption from taxes, market dues and municipal service. Earlier rewards included those of political and social status. Under Domitian stress was laid on the granting of Roman citizenship to a veteran's family. Octavian/Augustus included similar benefits, but added special voting rights and eligibility for certain priesthoods. Nevertheless, speculation may be permissible regarding a genuine diminution over time of the social status of the soldier and of his political identity as a citizen. These matters will be discussed when more general consideration is given to the social and legal status of soldiers (page 267ff).²⁴⁶

As a positive feature, fighting related to the virtue of courage, *virtus*. The Romans liked to stress the particular importance of *virtus* in their ethical ideals. Plutarch reflected this when he played on the word's double meaning, stating that

‘...there is only one word in the Latin vocabulary which signifies virtue, and its meaning is *manly valour*: thus the Romans made courage stand for virtue in all its aspects, although it only denotes one of them.’

²⁴⁶ **Agamemnon:** *Iliad*. 1. 185ff. **Nestor:** *ibid.* 6. 66-71. **Economic gain and recruitment:** Harris p. 58ff, 102-103; Jos. *BJ* 7. 15. **Plautus:** *Amph.* 193-4. **Avoiding the draft:** *Cod. Theod.* 7. 13. 10; Harris p. 47. **Inscriptions:** Lewis and Reinhold 1. 153, 2. 156.

The centrality of this link was stressed by Seneca as he commented on the necessity for Rome to be faced by enemies, 'Without an adversary *virtus* shrivels'. The primacy of *virtus* among the positive qualities of Roman emperors was illustrated by the author of the SHA's flattering portrait of Claudius Gothicus. To demonstrate that emperor's merits, reference was made to his possession of

'...the valour (*virtus*) of Trajan, the righteousness (*pietas*) of Antoninus, the self-restraint (*moderatio*) of Augustus, and the good qualities of all the great emperors'.

Thus, the martial virtue was given pride of place.²⁴⁷

The negative aspects of aggression and war were also accommodated in the ancient view of what constituted necessary/acceptable behaviour in a ruler. Homer had expressed both sides of this equation in Sarpedon's formulation of the implied contract between rulers and the ruled. In spite of a wistfully stated aversion to battle, the Lycian leader recorded his recognition that fighting was the return he made for honour and privilege. Again, although Homer's kings were expected to be first in battle, Zeus could still address Ares as 'most hateful to me of all Olympians. Combat and brawling are your element'. At what was ostensibly the most elemental level, Hesiod identified Battles and Combats as two of Strife's fifteen children. To underline the poet's distaste, their siblings were all unpleasant personifications and included Toil, Pain, Lies and Disaster. Subtler means could be used to undermine the more extreme aspects of 'Homeric' warrior values. Thucydides associated what he saw as over-bellicose rhetoric with violence of character and demagoguery. Plutarch appeared to record in a positive manner a number of instances in which his subjects fought opposing leaders in single combat; Pyrrhus duel with Pantauchus, and Pompey killing Cosis, the brother of Mithridates, are examples. However, the author immediately followed his account of the latter incident with speculation about the participation of Amazons in the ensuing battle, a possibility the likelihood of which he seemed to doubt. Thus a fantastical shadow was cast over the preceding duel. In fact as early as Philodemus it was a philosophical commonplace that the good king '...must therefore be warlike, but not a lover of battle' and '...even in times of relaxation it is essential to be constantly exercising for war'. Trajan provided something of a problem in this respect. Cassius

²⁴⁷ **Vocabulary** : Plut. *Vit. Cor.* 1 ; Sen. *Prov.* 2. 4. **Claudius Gothicus** : SHA *Claud.* 2. 3.

Dio plainly felt obliged to record that the *optimus princeps* 'did delight in war', but immediately softened the characterisation; Trajan was satisfied when victory was achieved and did not allow his troops to become arrogant or ill-disciplined. At the extreme, a love of fighting was a feature of a 'bad' emperor. Commodus evidently transgressed the boundaries of acceptable behaviour by actually taking part in gladiatorial contests.²⁴⁸

The close relationship between military victory and the authority of a monarch is reflected in Polybius' account of Attalos I of Pergamon. Following a pattern set by his predecessors, Philetairos and Eumenes I, Attalos ruled without the formal title of a king until after a decisive victory against the Gauls in 240 BCE. It has been suggested that the prominence of the concept of 'spear-won' legitimacy in the Macedonian and Hellenistic world can be illustrated by the frequency and literalness with which it was depicted. Spears are present on coin types of the *diadochoi* and can hardly be avoided in the most famous representation of Alexander's confrontation with Darius (**Plate 21**). A quotation from the *Suda* runs as follows:

'It is neither nature nor justice which gives monarchies to man, but the ability to command an army and to handle affairs competently'

Outside the concept of monarchy, military victory could be seen to legitimise general political authority. Issuing edicts, distributing gifts and honours, and regulating provinces were all

'...things which victors are wont to do only when a war has been brought to an end and finished'.²⁴⁹

Unequivocally positive expressions of the importance of *virtus* appear on the coinage of most Roman emperors. Examples of *VIRTUS AUG* on the coins of emperors markedly different in their actual behaviour indicate the ideological rather than descriptive content of such a legend. The least military emperors were described by our extant historical and biographical accounts with some reference to war, if only negatively or with regard to unexecuted intentions. Caligula's reported childhood

²⁴⁸ **Sarpedon's contract:** *Il.* 12. 322-328. **Zeus on Ares:** *Il.* 5.890. **Hesiod:** *Theog.* 226-232.

Demagoguery: Exemplified by Kleon (3. 36) and Athenagoras (6. 35), described in similar language. **Pyrrhus:** *Plut. Pyrrh.* 7. 5; Duff p. 121. **Pompey and Amazons:** *Plut. Pomp.* 35. 3-4. **Philodemus:** Murray p. 169. **Trajan:** *Cass. Dio* 68. 7. 5. **Commodus:** *SHA Comm.* 11. 10-12.

²⁴⁹ **Attalos I:** *Polyb.* 18. 41. 7-8; Shipley p. 312. **Spear-won legitimacy:** *Diod. Sic.* 18. 43. **Alexander mosaic:** Billows p. 27-28. ***Suda*:** Smith (1988) p. 49. **Victory and political acts:** *Plut. Pomp.* 38. 1-2.

Alexander Mosaic



experiences might have been assumed to prepare him for military activity. Instead, his actual involvements were depicted as a mixture of the accidental and the absurd. Nero was described as contemplating an expedition to the Caucasus, although not without a strong element of the characteristically theatrical;

‘He undertook preparations for an expedition to the Caspian Gates, with a new legion of conscripts from Italy, all six feet tall, whom he called the phalanx of Alexander the Great’

Pliny, consciously or not, provided a summary of the central relationships between war, the political ideology of Rome, and its emperors. Relating to one of Trajan’s campaigns in Dacia, he wrote:

‘May I congratulate you, noble Emperor, in your own name and that of the State, on a great and glorious victory in the finest traditions of Rome? I pray the gods to grant that all your designs meet with such a happy issue, and that the glory of your Empire be renewed and enhanced by your outstanding virtues.’

Here are assembled all the essential elements: the primacy of tradition; the compounding of the emperor’s person and the State; the glory available to both in victory; the association of the gods with the emperor’s actions; the role of glory in war as perpetuating (‘renewing’) the very existence of Rome; and the instrumental necessity of the emperor’s individual merits.²⁵⁰

At a more personal level than the achievement of military success, there was usually clear merit in a king taking an active part in fighting. There are numerous references to both Philip and Alexander being in the thick of battle and being wounded. That Thucydides recorded the deaths in the same skirmish of both opposing generals, Brasidas and Kleon, may be more relevant to the historian’s subsequent political analysis than to a factual account of ancient warfare. Nevertheless, aged between seventy and eighty, the Hellenistic monarch, Lysimachus, died at the head of his troops. Valerius Maximus used a simple method to establish the temporal and ethical primacy of a ruler’s participation in fighting. At the head of a lengthy section of examples of bravery, he declared that it was to

²⁵⁰ **Trajan:** BMC p. 103. **Antonius Pius:** BMC 259. **Marcus Aurelius:** BMC 1427. **Caligula’s childhood:** Tac. *Ann.* 1. 41. 2; Suet. *Cal.* 9. **His military involvement:** Suet. *Cal.* 43-46. **Nero:** Suet. *Ner.* 19. **Pliny’s summary:** *Ep.* 10. 14.

‘...Romulus, founder of our city, that the first place in this category of praise ought to be assigned...’.

Valerius Maximus supported this judgement by adding details to Livy’s account of Rome’s war with Caenina. Romulus was said to have willingly accepted the challenge to single combat made by Acro, the opposing city’s king, even though he knew that the Romans would have had the better of a conventional battle. Livy himself placed such single combat at the fountainhead of Roman self-perception when he described the simultaneous deaths of Brutus, the first consul, and Arruns Tarquinius, son of the deposed last king. When leading the cavalry of their respective armies, they had sought each other out in battle, both dying from the other’s spear thrust. Livy added the explicit comment that, ‘In those days it was to a general’s credit to take part in the actual fighting.’ In repeating the story from his late fourth century viewpoint, Eutropius added no such editorial comment, it by then being the norm for emperors to lead their troops in person. Polybius discussed the obvious problem of commanders involving themselves in fighting, commenting on their consequent loss of an over-all perspective on the battle. Plutarch drew attention to this difficulty by including as a specific merit of Pyrrhus that he managed to combine both. In a double account of Titus personally saving the day through his prowess in battle, Josephus examined the dilemma of a ruler putting himself at risk by leading from the front. The author had Titus’ troops urge him ‘...not to act the part of a common soldier’, because ‘...he on whom all depended ought not to face so imminent a risk’. Titus brushed aside the argument by fighting on; an outcome that appeared to have been satisfactory to Josephus judging by his fulsome praise of the commander at the conclusion of the incident.²⁵¹

Augustus’ personal involvement in fighting was seen at its most noteworthy in the accounts of the Illyrian War of 35/34 BCE. Florus gave it the full treatment. He had the young Caesar not only leading and directing the campaign, but at a crucial moment seizing the shield of a hesitating soldier and being first to cross a dangerous bridge. In case the message remained unclear, Augustus was described as

‘...wounded in the hands and legs, his comeliness enhanced by his blood and his dignity by his very danger’.

²⁵¹ **Philip and Alexander:** Hornblower (1991) p. 256; *Anab.* 2. 12, 27, 3. 30, 4. 24 and 6. 10. **Brasidas and Kleon:** Hornblower (1991) p. 135; Thucydides 5. 16. **Lysimachus:** Lund p. 182. **Romulus:** Val. Max. 3. 2 praef., 3. 2. 3; Livy 1. 10. **Brutus and Arruns:** *ibid.* 2. 6. 7-9; Eutr. 1. 10. **Loss of perspective:** Polyb. 10. 32-33; Plut. *Pyrrh.* 16. 7-8. Joseph. *BJ* 71-97.

There must be some likelihood of hindsight in the view that such demonstrations related to his need to match the military renown of Antony. In the context of Octavian's career to that date, it would be equally reasonable to see the requirement that personal valour be attached to his reputation as being necessary for any aspiring Roman leader. There are certainly references to his relationship with the army pre-dating the assassination of Julius Caesar, although it is of course impossible to discount the possibility that such 'facts', recorded long after Augustus' death, were inserted for their retrospective ideological plausibility. Titus' left arm was permanently weakened by a blow suffered at the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Trajan was described as being in the firing-line of missiles during another siege. Despite attempts to conceal his identity in terms of dress, we are told by Cassius Dio that '...seeing his majestic grey head and his august countenance' the enemy recognised him.²⁵²

In spite of the activities described above, a ready solution to this danger and to the problem outlined by Polybius had no less a figure than Augustus as model. In the initial stages of establishing power, military victory played a central role in his personal ideology. After Actium the forum was filled with monuments to his military success. Columns were erected topped by the prows of Egyptian ships modelled in bronze extracted from captured vessels, and figures of Tritons adorned the Temple of Saturn. However, as early as the planning for the Battle of Actium Octavian was portrayed as giving way to the advice of Agrippa. Suetonius recorded that Augustus took part in later campaigns in Dalmatia and Cantabria, and indeed that he was wounded. However, he went on to add that, 'His other wars were conducted through legates'. Augustus himself made personal claims about his military exploits ('I undertook many civil and foreign wars by land and sea throughout the world'), but also openly stated that these successes were '...gained by me or by my legates acting under my auspices'. The arrangements of 27 BCE had provided the *princeps* with a unique *imperium* over the provinces. Undoubtedly the military victories of his stepsons, Tiberius and Drusus, were absorbed into the official ideology as his successes. Illustrating this idea as an established element of the Imperial system, the SHA recorded in a straightforward manner that the wars of Antoninus Pius were fought through legates. However, the same source criticised Commodus for the

²⁵² **Illyrian war:** Flor. 2. 25. 7. **Rivalry with Antony:** Syme (1939) p. 239-240; App. *B Civ.* 3. 9. **Titus:** Cass. Dio 66. 5. 1. **Trajan:** *ibid.* 68. 31. 3.

practice. Thus, the desire of ancient authors to present over-all portrayals of 'good' and 'bad' rulers can make it hard to delineate specific behaviours as unequivocally positive or negative (se pages 183-184).²⁵³

Inscription and other evidence suggest the presence of Hadrian in Judea during the Jewish revolt of 132-135 CE. However, the Emperor's personal participation in the fighting there is not attested. In relation to Hadrian's non-expansionist policies, it may well be that the lack of military experience and inclination on the part of Antoninus Pius were viewed as positive features in the decision to adopt him as successor. When in 161 CE Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus ascended the throne:

'They had never seen an army – other than the Praetorian Guard – let alone military action'.

Thus, before Verus took the field against the Parthians in 162 it had been forty-five years since a reigning emperor (in the person of Trajan) had led a frontier army in a full-scale war. The triumph he held jointly with Marcus Aurelius to celebrate the end of this campaign was the first for fifty years. However, contrary to the claims of Fronto, it seems most probable that Verus participated little in actual fighting. It is tempting to see this evidence as casting doubt on the importance of military campaigns and triumphs for Imperial ideology. Yet it is clear that Marcus himself was personally involved in the campaigns against the Marcomanni, Quadi and others for many years in the 160s and 170s. In fact this regime proved to be a turning point in the history of Roman emperors' participation in active fighting. With the exception of a small number, who were clearly unsuitable for the role and/or reigned so briefly as to make a military campaign impossible, for the next two hundred years all emperors took the field in person. The exceptions included: Didius Julianus, who had military experience as a young man, but reigned for little more than two months in 193, and was more renowned as a lawyer and lover of extravagant food; Balbinus, deliberately chosen as an administrator to rule jointly with the soldier, Pupienus Maximus; and Valentinian II, four years old on the death in 375 of his father, Valentinian I, and always the puppet of others until his murder in 392. It is also worthy of note that many of the emperors who

²⁵³ **Augustan military monuments:** Zanker (1988) p. 79-82. **Agrippa:** Cass. Dio 50. 31. **Wars and wounds:** Suet. *Aug.* 20. **Imperium and legates:** Eder (1990) p. 106-107; Zanker (1988) p. 223-225. In relation to the last of these, Zanker's identification of Tiberius and Drusus (fig. 179a) seems more convincing than BMC Augustus 443-449's surely rather lame 'men offering olive branches'. *SHA: Ant. Pius* 5. 4; *Comm.*: 13. 5-7.

did lead their armies in person were described as doing so in a very direct manner indeed. The exploits of Titus and Trajan have already been mentioned. Among later emperors, Septimius Severus had his horse killed beneath him during the titanic battle with the forces of Albinus at Lugdunum in 196. Subsequent campaigns took him to Parthia, while as an ill man he was carried in a litter during the war in Britain, finally dying at York in 211. In keeping with his military background, Maximinus Thrax, was reported as actively leading his troops against the Germans, including being first to pursue the enemy into a treacherous swamp. Even Gallienus, portrayed as an irredeemably effete and unmilitary emperor, was said to have been wounded by an arrow during a siege in 265, while the same distinction was ascribed to the more martial Aurelian seven years later at Palmyra. The norm of martial emperors was maintained until the death of Theodosius I in 395, although contemporary theorists, for example Synesius of Cyrene, could still recommend that an emperor lead his troops in person.²⁵⁴

The line between courageous initiative and over-bold rashness was thin. It was explored by authors at very different times within the wide period covered by this thesis. Agesilaus, in an action that involved an unnecessary frontal attack resulting in heavy casualties and his own wounding, remained for Xenophon just on the right side of the distinction. A link with piety is introduced in order to bolster this position:

‘Agesilaus’ next action may, without any question at all, be described as courageous. One must own, however, that he certainly did not adopt the safest plan...In spite of the many wounds he had received, he still remembered what was due to heaven’

In Arrian’s account, Alexander’s ‘reckless courage’ was not only ‘engendered by success’, but was used by the king as an element of calculated strategy. In debate with the ever-cautious Parmenio, Alexander declared it to be in his nature to reject safe compromise in the pursuit of greater glory and that it was necessary to defy the odds because

²⁵⁴ **Hadrian:** Birley (1997) p. 272-273. **Antoninus Pius:** Birley (1987) p. 47. **Marcus and Lucius:** Birley (1987) p. 122-123, 130 and p. 147; *Fronto Ad Verum Imp.* 2. 1. 22-23 = *Loeb Vol. 2* p. 129-133; *SHA Marc.* 8. 12, 22. 7. **Didius Julianus:** *SHA Did. Jul.* 1. 1, 1. 6-9, 3. 8-9; *OCD* 3 p. 467. **Balbinus and Pupienus:** *Herodian* 7. 10. 4-5. **Valentinian II:** *Amm. Marc.* 30. 10. 4. **Severus’ horse:** *SHA Sev.* 11. 2. **Parthia:** *Cass. Dio* 75. 9. 1. **Britain:** *Cass. Dio* 76. 13. 4. **Maximinus:** *Herodian* 7. 2. 6-8. **Gallienus:** *SHA Gall.* 4. 4. **Aurelian:** *ibid. Aurel.* 26. 1. **Post-Theodosius I:** Lee p. 228-229. **Synesius:** Birley (1988) p. ix.

‘...success so far beyond reason and probability would be a serious blow to the morale of the enemy.’

Julian’s fatal wounding in 363 CE was described by Eutropius as being the result of his ‘...mingling too rashly in the battles’, whereas Ammianus Marcellinus reflected his generally positive view of that emperor by a more equivocal focus on his bravery, over-excitement and disregard of warnings.²⁵⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has sampled the wide range of personal characteristics seen as being relevant to the connected questions of a ruler’s merits and the legitimacy of his authority. It has done so while acknowledging that instances from that range may seem to be contradictory. For example, the Iranian concept of a shining *Hvarena* (something like ‘awful royal glory’), the possession of which appeared to be synonymous with lawful kingship, could hardly be more distinct from Pliny’s apparent image of Trajan as ‘one of us’. Yet there are echoes of the eastern concept of royalty in the fiery qualities attributed to the appearance of, for example, Hadrian and Commodus. In a work devoted to the theory of physiognomy, although laced with personal grudges, M. Antonius Polemon indicated that Hadrian’s ‘shining eyes’ denoted a ‘pure and spotless character.’ According to Herodian, central to the impressive exterior of the young Commodus was that ‘...his eyes were burning and flashing’ and that his hair gleamed as if ‘...a heavenly halo was shining round his head’. Echoes of Xenophon’s early fourth century BCE portrayal of Cyrus can be heard in Ammianus’ late fourth century CE account of Constantius II’s entry in to Rome. The latter author emphasised eyes, gaze, blaze and shimmer in a description of the Emperor, around whose person a ‘...mingled glitter seemed to form a sort of shifting light’. This pervasiveness of certain features attributed to successful rulers was found to be most prominent in the value placed upon the martial virtues, thus emphasising the military and coercive qualities of Roman emperors. There was certainly inconsistency in the manner with which these features were applied and evaluated by ancient authors. For example, the military merits of some emperors were described in such a way as to enhance their qualifications for the throne. Other emperors appeared to have been given scant credit for the possession of such qualities, while their absence in yet others could be

²⁵⁵ **Agesilaus:** Xen. *Ages.* 2. 12-13. **Alexander:** Arr. *Anab.* 4. 21, 2. 26. **Julian:** Eutr. 10. 16; Amm. Marc. 25. 3. 3-6.

expressed in ways that suggested either ignominy or no discredit. However, two elements are clear: firstly, that fighting and military skills were central to the range of features considered; and secondly, as concluded by Wallace-Hadrill, that the ancient literature on virtues and other aspects of ruler behaviour essentially addressed issues of the manner in which a sovereign ruled, rather than those concerning the bases of his power.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ *Hvarena*: Dvornik p. 84. *Trajan*: Plin. *Pan.* *Hadrian*: Pölemon *De physiognomia* 138; Birley (1997) p. 166. *Commodus*: Herodian. 1. 7. 5. *Constantius*: Amm. Marc. 16. 10. 4-6; Xen. *Cyr.* 8. 1 41-42; Matthews p. 233; Charlesworth (1947) p. 36. **Positive military career**: Suet. *Vesp.* 4; *Tit.* 4. **Poorly recognized military career**: SHA *Hadr.* 21. 8-14. **Ignominy**: Suet. *Calig.* 43-46; SHA *Alex. Sev.* 7. 10: **No discredit**: SHA *Ant. Pius* 5. 4). **How a sovereign rules**: Wallace-Hadrill (1981) p. 318.

8. The emperor and his soldiers

Introduction

In the first sentence of the preface to his definitive work on this subject, Brian Campbell could hardly have been clearer about the main source of an emperor's power. At least in respect of the security of his throne:

‘Ultimately the Roman emperor did not rely for survival on political parties...groups of senators and equites, or on mass popular support...but on military strength and the personal loyalty of his army.’²⁵⁷

In this chapter evidence will be examined concerning the origins and development of the connection between the emperors' political power and the Roman military. General questions to be addressed will include: What were the elements of the relationship between the emperor and his soldiers? Was there a set of generalisable features or did the attitudes of individual emperors predominate? What role did soldiers play in an emperor's initial candidature, the ongoing support of his activities and his tenure of office? The definitive nature of the quotation from Campbell cited above should lead to the anticipation of at least some positive responses to these questions. Part of this section will take the form of a re-examination and expansion of the evidence presented in both primary and secondary sources. However, in order to expose the crucial role of the military in the coercive Roman state, it will be necessary to consider some rather more specific questions: To what extent were soldiers politically aware and active? Did soldiers' legal and social position have specific implications for the emperor's authority over his subjects? Was there a political element, whether explicit or implicit, in soldiers' behaviour towards civilians? At their different levels it is the answers to these sets of questions that may reveal a coercive core in the authority of Roman emperors.

The attitude of ancient authors

Before looking at evidence relevant to these questions it will be well to bring together and to re-emphasise important features of the evidence available to us. It must be acknowledged that the direct evidence about soldiers' attitudes and motives is severely limited. The content of inscriptions, papyri and other writings, such as those found at Vindolanda, cannot be stretched far towards answering questions about the political

²⁵⁷ Campbell: 1984 p. vii

involvement of soldiers. The ancient comments we have on that subject come from our elite literary sources. It has been argued that these writers could express 'a more than sneaking admiration' for an ideal of the rugged military ethos under which soldiers were at least supposed to operate. However, it seems unreasonable to interpret the warm feelings of our sources as extending to soldiers' involvement in politics. In fact ancient writers characteristically adopted a moral and judgemental tone when considering the issue.

A good example is provided by the writings of Cassius Dio. Undoubtedly and self-consciously a member of the elite, he made his general attitudes clear by describing Trajan's good government in terms of his having done 'much to please the better element'. Cassius Dio made no secret of his allegiance to the senatorial elite. He identified a watershed in his writings at 192 CE, claiming from that time to have witnessed the events he described. One result of this was a predilection to refer to 'us' and 'we' when describing the activities of the senate. Notably he included himself in this manner when he described Pertinax greeting the senate only after securing the loyalty of the Praetorians in 193 CE. The surviving epitomes of Cassius Dio's historical work ended in 229 CE. In that year he held the ordinary consulship with the Emperor, Severus Alexander, as his colleague. He stated that he was granted additional honours and even that his consular expenses were paid by the Emperor himself. Reading the relevant passages in context, however, it is hard not to feel sympathy for the author. What ought to have been the triumphant climax to an already distinguished career was in fact sandwiched between accounts of his personal difficulties with undisciplined soldiers. The Emperor, fearful it was said for the very life of his fellow consul, persuaded Dio spend his time '...in Italy, somewhere outside of Rome', thus minimising the chances of running up against recalcitrant troops. Despite the addition of some heroic verses from Homer, Dio's grand history concluded with leaden bathos, as he felt obliged to seek permission to retire because of his bad feet. Perhaps this explains why Dio's attitude towards soldiers in general and, in particular, their involvement in politics was consistently negative. For example, he described the elevation to the throne of Elagabalus as being in no small part engineered by greedy soldiers. They paraded their teenage nominee, advertising falsely that he was the son of Caracalla, himself closely associated with the army. Dio later recorded that Elagabalus was eventually overthrown and killed by soldiers, drawing the moral:

‘Thus it is that persons, particularly if armed, when they have once accustomed themselves to feel contempt for their rulers, set no limit to their right to do what they please, but keep their arms ready to use against the very man who gave them that power.’

These attitudes must have been based on Dio’s personal experience as a commander and on his reflections about history, coloured in particular by the civil wars and military rebellions of the late second century. They can also be seen to be retrojected into his account of the earliest stages of the principate. Maecenas’ invented speech of advice to Augustus contained the recommendation for a professional army, drawn from

‘...those in most need of a livelihood....who are in their physical prime, who are often compelled to win a livelihood by brigandage’.

Dio specifically differentiated this group from the respectable farmers, sailors and other tradesmen of the citizen body. He later reported that the Praetorians disbanded by Septimius Severus in 193 CE had indeed turned to brigandage.²⁵⁸

Cassius Dio was far from being the only ancient author to express distaste at the involvement of soldiers in politics, although some of these articulated views require careful attention. In the opening of his life of Galba, Plutarch appeared to be unequivocal. In a number of contexts he recorded condemnation of the army’s participation in the affairs of state. At one level these were specific and appeared to be relatively trivial, as in the story of Aemilius Paullus’ rebuke to his legions in Macedonia. On taking command in 167 BCE and finding them to be ‘infected with loquacity and meddlesomeness’, he advised the troops to

‘...take no thought or concern for anything, except how each man might keep himself and his armour in readiness for action, and ply his sword in Roman fashion (and) that he himself would look out for the rest’.

At a wider and more significant level, Plutarch indicated that the problems experienced by the Empire after the death of Nero in 68 CE showed clearly that

‘...an empire has nothing more fearful to show than a military force given over to untrained and unreasoning impulses’

²⁵⁸ **Admiration for military ethos:** Lendon (1997) p. 238. **Trajan:** Cass. Dio 68. 5. 4. **Pertinax:** *ibid.* 74. 1. 4. **The end of Cassius Dio’s career:** *ibid.* 80. 4. 2-5. 3. **Elevation of Elagabalus:** *ibid.* 79. 32. 2. **Dio’s judgement:** *ibid.* 80. 17. 1. **Maecenas:** *ibid.* 52. 27. 5. **Praetorian brigandage:** *ibid.* 75. 2. 5.

The responsibility for this state of affairs appeared to laid at the feet of troops themselves; the Empire

‘...collapsing upon itself, not so much through the ambition of those who were proclaimed emperors, as through the greed and licence of the soldiery’.

However, Plutarch seemed to forget his own assessment of accountability almost immediately, since he proceeded to portray Nymphidius Sabinus as the one who ‘...persuaded the soldiery to proclaim Galba emperor’ and who eventually took ‘...the entire control of affairs into his own hands’.²⁵⁹

The surviving accounts of the short reign of Otho during 69 CE revealed features similar to those just discussed. Tacitus could hardly have characterised the situation in starker terms. Against a backdrop of Otho’s courting the goodwill of the troops through familiarity, favours and ‘...all the other arts which work upon uneducated minds’, Tacitus portrayed him as encouraging two junior officers to assassinate Galba. The historian therefore felt himself able to describe the event in horrified and censorious language:

‘So a couple of common soldiers took it upon them to hand over the Roman Empire – and they did it.’

If this did not indicate clearly enough Tacitus’ view of who was controlling events, he soon spelled out his assessment in no uncertain manner: ‘The will of the soldiers was henceforward supreme.’ As evidence for this extreme statement he made the doubtful claim that the Praetorians were able to appoint their own officers. At the other end of Otho’s short reign the spontaneous will of the soldiers was strongly expressed but entirely ineffectual. As news spread of the defeat of his forces at the first battle of Cremona in April 69, troops loyal to Otho, both Praetorians and legionaries from Moesia, urged him to fight on. The Emperor, however, declined to continue what he termed the ‘contest’ with Vitellius for the throne. This use of competitive language is relevant to the themes of rivalry, personal ambition and psychological domination explored elsewhere in this thesis. In fact Tacitus had Otho elaborate the point and claim a sort of individual distinction even in defeat:

²⁵⁹ **Aemilius Paullus:** Plut. *Aem.* 13. 4 and *Galb.* 1. 2; Pl. *Resp.* 376A-C as an origin of this idea. **Post-Nero:** *Galb.* 1. 3. **Ordinary soldiers’ responsibility:** ibid. 1. 4. **Nymphidius:** ibid. 2. 1 and 8. 1.

‘Others may have held the sceptre longer, but no one can ever have laid it down so bravely’.

Here, however, the issue is the straightforward one that Otho provided another example illustrating the limitations of our sources’ editorial view that undisciplined soldiers were in control of affairs. Not only did the Emperor refuse the calls by the troops to continue the war, but in order to leave no doubt about his good faith in this matter he committed suicide. Tacitus described the anguish among Otho’s loyal soldiers at this course of events, distress that was sufficient to bring about its emulation on a not inconsiderable scale.²⁶⁰

The issue of who was really controlling events, the soldiers or their leaders, can be approached from a slightly different direction by examining the career of L. Verginius Rufus. There is ample evidence in our sources that during the crises of 68-69 CE there was a strong and repeated desire among the legions to proclaim Verginius Rufus emperor. In May 68 at Vesontio in Gaul the army of Verginius had defeated the forces of Vindex in their open revolt against Nero. The victorious soldiers of the Upper German legions pressed Verginius to become emperor. He declined the offer, but it was not without some difficulty that he restrained his troops and restored order. Tacitus added the detail that legions originating in Illyricum had also ‘made overtures to Verginius’ at this time. Most sources credited the general with conceding to the senate and people of Rome the right to appoint a new emperor. Perhaps unsurprisingly, bearing in mind his general views described above, Cassius Dio went further. He suggested that Verginius’ decision may have been

‘...merely (my emphasis) because he did not deem it right for soldiers to bestow the supreme power upon anyone...or because he was entirely high-minded and felt no desire himself for the imperial office, to secure which others were willing to do anything and everything’.

The distinction being drawn here appeared to attach the greater potential merit to the conjectured feature of Verginius’ moral make-up. The opinion that soldiers should not appoint an emperor was relegated to a secondary status. Such a differentiation supports two of the main elements of this thesis; it weakens the view that soldiers had no place

²⁶⁰ **Otho suborns the troops:** Tac. *Hist.* 1. 23-25. **Soldiers supreme and Praetorians choosing their officers:** *ibid.* 1. 46. **Tacitus’ claim:** accepted by Wellesley p. 27; doubted by Levene (Tac. *Hist* n 28 p. 255) and by Chilver (1979) p. 103. **Otho’s suicide:** Tac. *Hist.* 2. 46-49; Plut. *Oth.* 15-17.

in the legitimate Roman political process and it highlights the element of personal morality/psychology in that process. Accounts in our sources of the Battle of Vesontio contribute to this analysis. Both Plutarch and Cassius Dio suggested that a reluctant Verginius was more or less forced into fighting Vindex by his own troops. However, this portrayal of a wilful army seems more in line with the authors' editorial views on the matter than it does with the details of their own histories. There is surely a basic incongruity in soldiers repeatedly championing as potential emperor a general who was not even in control of his forces in the face of an enemy.²⁶¹

After the death of Nero in June 68, Verginius defied further attempts by his soldiers to elevate him to the throne. Instead he gave way to Galba's nominee as commander of the German legions and joined the entourage of the new emperor. Although Tacitus, Plutarch and Cassius Dio suggested that he was regarded with some suspicion by Galba, all indicated that Verginius came to no harm in these circumstances. Based no doubt on his knowledge of a greater number of emperors, Dio was able to add the dry comment that the general might have regarded it as an unusual favour that in his case '...a man who had frequently been hailed as emperor was allowed to live'. In fact Verginius held a consulship under Otho and on the death of that emperor in April 69 he was in Rome. Yet again

'...soldiers turned to (him) and begged him with threats now to accept the principate'.

Once more he avoided the situation, this time by fleeing. As a postscript it is worth adding that this most durable of characters, having gained his first consulship under Nero in 63 and survived the suspicions of all the Flavians, was consul for the third time in 97 with the special honour of being colleague to the then emperor, Nerva. It is relevant that this late honour, Verginius was then in his eighties, may have occurred precisely because of the old general's high reputation with the soldiers. It has been argued persuasively that at that time, Nerva's shaky regime badly needed a specifically military endorsement. The distinguished nature of Verginius' career was given a suitable conclusion soon after by the rare allocation of a public funeral, at which

²⁶¹ **May 68:** Tac. *Hist.* 1. 8; Cass. Dio 63. 25; Plin. *Ep.* 6. 10; Plut. *Galb.* 6. 2 (Plutarch actually suggested that even before the battle Verginius' troops had been trying to persuade him to become emperor). **Illyrian legions:** Tac. *Hist.* 1. 9. **SPQR:** Cass. Dio 63. 25. 2-3; Plut. *Galb.* 6. 2. **Verginius' moral outlook:** Cass. Dio 63. 25. 3. The issue of control before Vesontio is discussed by Griffin (1996) p. 286 n. 94 and the idea that the battle was an 'accident' caused by undisciplined soldiery was rejected by Levick (1985) p. 330.

Tacitus gave the oration. Taken in the round, the career of L. Verginius Rufus indicated on a number of occasions that soldiers formed an important constituency among those who had an active interest in the destination of the Imperial title. As such, they could make known their wishes in a forceful manner. However, it by no means supports the view of some of our sources that the events of high politics were completely at their mercy.²⁶²

A senatorial outlook and consequent bias against soldiers' involvement in politics was certainly the norm in our later literary sources. Aurelius Victor characterised the election of Tacitus as emperor in 275 CE as a happy occasion

‘...because the senators had recovered the right to choose the emperor from the arrogant military’.

Although any clear and consistent editorial prejudice is hard to distinguish in the SHA, its author does appear to favour a senatorial viewpoint. His outlandish lament on the death of Probus, with its evocation of an ideal world in which there were no soldiers, illustrated the general tone.²⁶³

Military strength and political authority

It would be entirely conventional to identify Gaius Marius as the first in a line of individuals whose challenge to the prevailing control of the senatorial oligarchy led to its weakening during the first century BCE. A yet wider perspective might suggest that the career of Scipio Africanus provided still earlier indications that an individual could overcome the political system's restrictions on personal power. In either case the point to be made here is the same; the threat to the status quo was based on military achievements and on the personal loyalty of soldiers. However, reflecting the attitudes described in the previous section, the editorial comments of our ancient authors do not always give full weight to the political nature of this process. For example, the analysis contained in Plutarch's *Lives* has been found to be deficient in respect of its failure to recognise the full extent of the role of soldiers. Nevertheless, even here the material presented does seem to provide abundant evidence for just such a view. Thus it is perhaps noteworthy that the biographer chose to include a story that linked a later

²⁶² **June 68:** Plut. *Galb.* 10. 2-3; Tac. *Hist.* 1. 8; Cass. Dio 63. 29. **April 69:** Tac. *Hist.* 2. 51; Plut. *Oth.* 18. 3. **Consulships:** OCD3 p. 1588; Tac. *Ann.* 15. 23. 1; Cass. Dio 68. 2. 4. **Nerva's difficulties:** Beriman and Todd p. 316. **Funeral:** Plin. *Ep.* 2. 1.

²⁶³ **Tacitus:** Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 36; Watson p. 211. **Probus:** SHA *Prob.* 24; OCD3 p. 713.

Scipio with Marius. Having given pride of place to the latter's military qualities in introducing his account, Plutarch reported that these features had come to the attention of Scipio Aemilianus Africanus in 133 BCE. When the general was asked if he could suggest someone who might emulate his military glory, Scipio was said to have indicated the young Marius. In his earliest political acts Marius was depicted as using force in the senate, responding to opposition by having his rival, Metellus, imprisoned. Plutarch recorded the first action of his subject as consul to be that of levying troops from the lower sections of society 'contrary to law and custom'. Marius was said to have 'pleased the soldiers' and a notable feature of Plutarch's portrait contrasted his pre-eminence in war with a lack of skill in the political arena of the popular assemblies. To get the vote he wanted over one issue he '...stirred up the soldiery (and) got them to mingle with the citizens in the assembly.' As a climax to this behaviour, Plutarch recorded Marius' deployment of troops in the forum during his sixth consulship in 100 BCE. Although the author's comments here seem a little cryptic, he must have been referring to this matter when he wrote that his subject had caused

'...a mischief that was not to be cured, but made its way by arms and slaughter directly towards tyranny and subversion of the government'.

The 'mischief' that Plutarch had in mind was surely that of the substantial overthrow of the Republic during the following one hundred years, when Marius' successors as military leaders, Sulla, Pompey, Julius Caesar and Octavian, dominated the state and paved the way for the emperors.²⁶⁴

Accession and overthrow

In relation to Mommsen's dictum that '...any soldier had the right to make someone else emperor', the distinction has been drawn between the army's *de facto* and *de jure* roles in establishing an emperor in power. For example, having acknowledged that '...troops had the practical power to make a man emperor', Campbell went on to assert that:

'Those who sought the purple...would never have thought in terms of the soldiers having a legal right to be asked for their support and to confer power.'

²⁶⁴ **Marius and Scipio:** Harris p. 158, 27; OCD3 p. 925; Gabba p. 26; Plut. *Mar.* 2. 1-3. 3; Cic. *Rep.* 6. 12; Stevenson p. 146-147. **Plutarch's analysis:** Pelling p. 344-346. **Metellus:** Plut. *Mar.* 4. 3. **Troop levy:** ibid. 9. 1. **Pleasing the soldiers:** ibid. 14. 3. **Lack of political skill:** ibid. 28. 1-3. **Soldiers in the assembly:** ibid. 28. 5. **Soldiers in the forum:** ibid. 30.

Some of the difficulties in applying strictly legal criteria to the question of Roman Imperial authority have already been explored (see page 143ff). In spite of the mass of relevant evidence deployed in chapter IX of his 1984 study, the contrast drawn by Campbell is probably misleading in two ways. Firstly, the presentation of the issue in terms of such a dichotomy is too closely related to the preoccupations of nineteenth and early twentieth century scholarship. Mindful of the truism that ‘All history is contemporary history’, a defensible generalisation could characterise scholarship of that period as examining the Roman Empire from the perspective of the then existing and emerging nation states/empires. The relevant political context was dominated by the identification of constitutional checks and balances in the power relationships within and between the existing imperial, monarchical and democratic European countries. Mommsen himself is generally held to represent an interpretive orientation that focussed on relatively strict legal definitions of power. For example, he has been seen to interpret the position of *princeps* as being equivalent to one of the regulated magistracies of the Roman state. Famously he defined the rule of Augustus as a formal dyarchy, in which the *princeps* shared power with the senate, each having delineated areas of power and responsibility. Secondly, the *de facto/de jure* distinction reflected an explicit view of Roman soldiers as possessing no political role or consciousness of their own. Rather their impact on political events was seen as that of powerful tools in the hands of ambitious members of the elite, and their actions as being motivated solely by short-term pecuniary self-interest. To a considerable extent this analysis was underpinned by adherence to Cassius Dio’s perception of Roman soldiers as a group drawn from and reflecting the interests of the lowest elements of the plebeians.²⁶⁵

To suggest a different interpretation of the army’s role in the accession and overthrow of emperors, evidence will be reconsidered, for example on the significance of military acclamations and donatives. However, as an initial framework on which to examine these aspects of the army’s role, it must be acknowledged that the institution of the Roman military was far from operating in a monolithic fashion. It must be correct to reject the concept of a dominant and permanent ‘high command’ of *virī militares*. Clearly military experience formed a significant element in the training and in at least

²⁶⁵ **Emperors made by soldiers:** Campbell (1984) p. 374-5; Mommsen 2. 2. p. 814. **Mommsen and dyarchy:** for discussion see Linderski (1990) p. 50-52; Eder (1990) p. 78-79. **De Jure/de facto:** see, for example, Jones, H. S. p. 160-161; Campbell (1984) p. 10, 198, 386 and (2002) p. 32ff.

the early careers of the elite that ruled Rome. Polybius had stated that ten years' service in the army was a prerequisite for political office, a qualification that Trajan was said to have fulfilled. Nevertheless, the essentially amateur status of Roman military leaders should be emphasised, while the high status that our ancient sources' accorded to military achievement may be a factor in the absence of discussion of this lack of professionalism. It may be possible, however, to draw analogies from writings on other subjects. Cato the Younger was described as being unusual in his mastery of the detail involved in the post of quaestor. He deprived the treasury clerks of their accustomed role as the effective 'superiors' of those nominally set over them. To underplay the amateurism of the elite who led the soldiers would probably constitute a specific instance of the general problem of anachronism in the study of the Roman military organisation, equating its form and operation too closely with that of modern armies. In fact it has been argued that the political role of the Roman army was limited by its structure; no officer class or central command in Rome, its regular leadership (centurions) being essentially permanent but of low status, while its high status leadership (equites and senators) was temporary. As a result of these features it must be acknowledged that the army as a single political unit did not make or break emperors. However, it will be argued that the undoubted validity of these considerations, together with the misleading *de facto* / *de jure* contrast and the view of the soldiery as depoliticised, has led to a significant underestimate of Roman soldiers as a specific political constituency.²⁶⁶

Acclamations

Defined as '...vocal expressions of approval and good wishes in ritual form', acclamations were an important element in the communication of public opinion in the ancient world. Homer, for example, included a formal debate among the Greek troops in which

'...a great shout from the Argives echoed fiercely among the ships: they cried "Aye" to noble Odysseus' words.'

Voting in the Spartan assembly was conducted in a similarly oral manner. The Macedonian military would be gathered and asked to voice its approval of a course of

²⁶⁶ *Viri militares*: Campbell (1984) p. 328-330; (1975) p. 17-24. *Experience*: Polyb. 6. 19 ; Plin. *Pan.* 15. 3. *Cato*: Plut. *Cat. Min.* 16. 1-3. *Anachronism*: Alston (1995) p. 3-4. *Structure*: Isaac (1992) p. 381, 384.

action at moments of particular crisis. These might include such occasions as the death of a king. Although all commentators do not agree on the precise powers of the army assembly in these circumstances, it has been suggested that its role presaged that of eighteenth century Prussia, which Mirabeau famously described as ‘...not a state that possesses an army, but an army that possesses a state’. A notable and multiply documented example of the Macedonian army’s involvement in politics occurred when Alexander unexpectedly died at Babylon in 323 BCE. He had named no successor beyond the cryptically unhelpful suggestion that it should be ‘the strongest/best man’. In relation to the events that followed, modern views cover a wide spectrum. Some regard it as being unnecessary for Alexander to have named a successor since the army could choose one. Others suggest that the army’s role was a formal one, to approve the chosen candidate. Yet others indicate that, in the context of Alexander’s death, the army’s intervention constituted a mutiny incited by officers. Thus, it remains unclear whether an assembly’s acclamation was necessary for a Macedonian monarch’s legitimacy. What is beyond doubt is that the army occupied centre stage in deliberations about the successor.²⁶⁷

In addition to Diodorus, references in Plutarch and a fragmentary epitome of a lost work by Arrian, Curtius Rufus provided our most substantial account of this process. The complex and still disputed detail of the affair lies outside the scope of this thesis. However, Curtius’ description is of particular interest because of the extent to which it was coloured by the author’s experience of Roman events. While uncertainties about Curtius’ identity must be acknowledged, he may well have been the suffect consul of 43 CE referred to by Tacitus. If so, it supports a view that as, in Errington’s words, ‘a Roman man of affairs’, he could have witnessed the accessions of Tiberius, Gaius and Claudius. The circumstances of the last of these will be examined later from a number of different angles, since they provide significant testimony concerning the role of the army. At this point it is relevant to keep in mind the events of 41 CE following the assassination of Gaius, because of similarities between them and Curtius’ account of what happened in Babylon in 323 BCE. These similarities, it will be argued, allow plausible generalisations to be made from Curtius’ expressed views about the political

²⁶⁷ **Definition:** OCD3 p. 4; *Il.* 2. 335-340. **Sparta:** Forrest p. 47-50. **Macedonian army assembly:** Billows p. 18-20. **Prussia:** Ducrey p. 50. **‘Best man’:** Arr. *Anab.* 7. 26. **Range of modern views:** Errington (1970) p. 49-50; Shipley p. 40; Bosworth p. 174.

role of the Macedonian army to that of Roman soldiers during the period in which he was writing.²⁶⁸

The troops at Babylon have been described as being ‘...the nearest convenient equivalent to a Macedonian army assembly’. While the generals debated possibilities and jockeyed for position, it was reported that the rank and file infantry took the initiative. They produced and acclaimed as king Alexander’s half-brother, Arrhidaeus. Sources other than Curtius are clear that previously this individual had been overlooked because he was regarded as being in some way mentally unfit. This assessment is surely supported by the mere fact of Arrhidaeus’ survival until 323 BCE in the face of Alexander’s otherwise thorough cull of family members who might have had claims to the throne. Unlike other sources, Curtius appeared to play down the supposed deficiencies of the young man. These may of course be detailed in the lost parts of Curtius’ account, but in relation to the succession to Alexander they are only hinted at and then largely ignored as Arrhidaeus is portrayed as a manipulated but active participator in the events at Babylon. At one stage he is given an eloquent and effective speech, offering to give up the throne and urging an end to discord. The parallels between the acclamation of Arrhidaeus and that of Claudius are clear enough not to require exposition. Not only that, but Curtius’ may have been deliberately suppressing the otherwise well advertised defects of Arrhidaeus in order to make his situation appear more convincingly like that of the Roman emperor. Whatever his inherent problems may have been, Claudius ruled as undoubted emperor for thirteen years; Arrhidaeus became the puppet of successive contenders in the struggle for control of Alexander’s succession, finally being murdered in 317 BCE. By accentuating the similarities between the two, Curtius would have been using his experience of contemporary events to enhance his account, at the same time adding a layer of interest for his readers.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ **Alexander’s successor:** Diod. Sic. 18. 1-2; Plut. *Eum.* 3; Arrian *FGrH* 156 F 1 = Austin (1981) 22(a); Curt. 10. 7. 7ff; Errington (1970) p. 50-73. **Curtius’ identity and historiography:** OCD3 p. 415-416; Tac. *Ann.* 11. 20. 3-21. 3; Atkinson p. 73. Badian (1962) p. 382; Errington (1978) p. 87.

²⁶⁹ **Troops at Babylon:** Errington (1970) p. 49-50. **Arrhidaeus:** Plut. *Alex.* 77. 5; Diod. Sic. 18. 2. 2; Errington (1970) p. 52. **Alexander’s purges:** Diod. Sic. 17. 2. 3-6, 17. 5. 2. **Curtius’ hints:** Curt. 10. 7. 4-5. **Arrhidaeus’ speech:** Curt. 10. 8. 16-21. **Acclamation of Claudius:** Suet. *Claud.* 10; Jos. *BJ* 2. 204-214. **Murder of Arrhidaeus:** Diod. Sic. 19. 11. 4.

The established Claudian anachronism of Curtius' account permits an examination of its details for other echoes of Roman affairs; in particular his views on the role of soldiers may provide evidence concerning the political involvement of the legions. It must be acknowledged that in these particulars, as in Curtius' writings over-all, care and consistency were not marked characteristics. Nevertheless, in setting up the debate at Babylon, he clearly gave soldiers a central role. Curtius mingled the ideas of a private discussion between the generals and a formal assembly of the troops; the initial invitation to discussion was made to '...the chief of the king's friends and the leaders of his forces'; by way of introduction to the general's speech, he had Perdicas spell out the situation to the massed soldiers as, 'We have need of a head. To name one is in your power'. At a crucial stage in the difficult discussions the claims of Arrhidaeus were put forward by

'...a man unknown to most of the Macedonians, one of the lowest of the common people'.

With such a description, Curtius went out of his way to indicate the involvement of the ordinary soldiers. In the fashion typical of our other elite sources, he had pejorative intent in associating the troops with the '*vulgi*', contrasted with the '*principum*' of the officers. Nevertheless, the formality of the expressed popular view was portrayed in the phalanx 'clashing their spears against their shields' to signify approval of Arrhidaeus. After much wrangling, involving the generals, the soldiers, and the infantry and cavalry as separate protagonists, Curtius' account ended with a settlement under the auspices of both the army and the 'leading men'.²⁷⁰

In spite of his own social prejudices, Curtius thus provided useful evidence for the involvement of soldiers in the process of choosing Alexander's successor. In relation to specific parallels with the installation of Roman emperors within the author's experience, and with his general tendency to retroject Roman features, Curtius' evidence is relevant to the formation of a view of similar involvement by Roman soldiers. In the context of Alexander, attempts have been made to dismiss the soldiers' involvement as reflecting merely either their 'mundane ambitions' for pay and discharge or a pragmatic response by the elite to the situation in Babylon. While there

²⁷⁰ **Debate/assembly:** Curt. 10. 6. 1-4. **Perdicas:** ibid. 10. 6. 8. **Arrhidaeus' lowly champion:** ibid. 10. 7. 1. ***Vulgi/principum*:** ibid. 10. 7. 8. **Spears and shields:** ibid. 10. 7. 14. **Wrangling:** ibid. 10. 7. 16 - 9. **Settlement:** ibid. 10. 10.1ff.

may be some truth in these explanations, both the requirements of the troops and the realities of power operating at Babylon in 323 BCE were genuinely part of a political landscape. Thus Lock missed the point in his assessment that, 'It seems unnecessary to see any political initiative' in the activities of the Macedonian soldiers. The lack of any operating legalistic formula, an absence which was obviously lamented by Lock, did not mean that the events were outside definable political processes, or that they were not recognised as such by their participants and by our ancient sources.²⁷¹

In the Roman Republic a successful general could be hailed '*imperator*' on the battlefield and have the right to add the honour to his name. Augustus recorded that he had been saluted as *imperator* twenty-one times, although many of his victories were gained by others. In the context of military operations it became the norm for emperors to be credited with at least one acclamation as *imperator*. A close connection developed between such honours and the general power to command (*imperium*). This lay behind the trend for their concentration during the early principate on the ruler and his designated successors. Tacitus recorded that Augustus had both his stepsons, Tiberius and Nero Drusus, hailed as *imperator*. However, he went on to explain that at the time '...there was no lack of heirs of his own blood.' In fact Tiberius was accorded seven of his eight acclamations while Augustus was alive, Titus fifteen of his seventeen during his father's reign. Later, Tacitus could report in a matter-of-fact manner that the troops proclaimed Tiberius *imperator* after a victory by Germanicus in 16 CE. In time, as the connection between actual military achievement and imperial honours became more distant, their role in establishing the general authority of the emperor increased in significance. Tacitus may have been consciously reflecting this change in his account of the early days of Vespasian's bid for power. The historian described the scene in Judea when, impatient in their enthusiasm to promote their leader's cause,

'...a few of the soldiers, forming up in the usual way to salute him as commander (*legatum*), saluted him as emperor (*imperatorem*). The others promptly rushed up calling him Caesar and Augustus'.

²⁷¹ **Mundane ambitions:** Errington (1970) p. 51. **Pragmatism:** Lock p. 105-107. In a similar vein, Lock characterised the army's acclamation of Alexander as King of Asia as being nothing 'more formal than an outburst of enthusiasm' (p. 100; Plut. *Alex.* 34).

The primacy of the military nomenclature over the other Imperial names should be noted, as should the positive effect wrought by these events on Vespasian's confidence.²⁷²

Prior to Constantine, Claudius, that most unmilitary of emperors, recorded the highest number of acclamations. His twenty-seven topped the twenty-two of Domitian, the twenty of Vespasian and the thirteen of Trajan. While it seems possible to argue that these emperors either had a greater than average need to use accepted means to confirm their grip on power or were particularly close to the army, such reasoning does not explain Caracalla's low figure of three or indeed their complete absence in the record of Severus Alexander. However, the Imperial evidence does demonstrate a specific connection between military acclamations and the political position of the emperor. Understanding the precise nature of this connection is an important matter for this research as it may help in the assessment of the political power of the army.²⁷³

In a ceremonial context traceable almost one hundred years earlier, the Eastern Emperor, Marcian, was crowned in 450 CE at the *Hebdomon*, the major army camp situated at the seventh milestone from Constantinople. Our account of the accession of his successor, Leo I, in 457 provided even clearer detail of the involvement of the military in the ceremony. He was apparently crowned by an army quartermaster, the new emperor acknowledging the acclamation of the troops by accepting his elevation to the throne through the power of '...God the almighty and your decision, most brave fellow-soldiers.' How had this state of affairs come about? The accession of Gaius in 37 CE provides a useful perspective on this issue. It is perhaps significant that our sources recorded for him a number of specific links to the army prior to his becoming emperor. As an infant he had accompanied his parents, Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder, with the legions in Germany. On account of his being habitually dressed in a miniature military uniform the troops had nicknamed him Caligula ('Little Boots'). Less whimsically, the possibility that Gaius and his mother might be sent from the camp into danger was cited by Suetonius and Tacitus as one of the reasons why Germanicus was able to regain control of the troops during the mutiny of 14 CE. To

²⁷² **Republic:** Campbell (1984) p. 122. **Augustus:** RG 4. 1-2. **Norm for emperors:** Campbell (1984) p. 122. **Imperator/imperium:** App. *B Civ.* 2. 44; McCormick (1986) p. 13. **Designated successors:** Campbell (1984) p. 125; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 3. 1, 2. 18. 2. **Vespasian:** Tac. *Hist.* 2. 80.

²⁷³ **Acclamation numbers:** Campbell (1984) p. 124-5.

emphasize the soldiers' feelings towards the child, Tacitus referred to him as 'the legions' foster-son'. Perhaps building on these elements, Suetonius had the adult Gaius seduce Ennia Naevia expressly 'to increase his chances' of becoming emperor by gaining influence over her husband, Macro, the Praetorian Prefect.²⁷⁴

In this context it is noteworthy that from the accession of Gaius it became standard procedure for a new emperor to address the Praetorian Guard as one of his first acts. It seems unlikely to be coincidental that from the same reign come our first *adlocutio* coins, depicting an emperor speaking to soldiers in a formal setting. Gaius also appeared to be the first emperor to count his initial acceptance by the army in Rome as his first recorded acclamation. Campbell seemed to be unsure whether the occasion of this appearance before the troops was purely ceremonial or whether it constituted a significant element in establishing the ruler in power. A papyrus probably relating to the revolt of Avidius Cassius in 175 CE, although difficult to interpret, may support the latter position. In the document a distinction was apparently drawn between election by the troops and the practical assumption of power – the first being used as a justification for the second. A passage in Cassius Dio may concur with this view. Campbell invoked his distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* elements of the soldiers' role in this example. He did the same in reviewing Tacitus' account of Nero's accession. In both instances obtaining the acclamation by troops was seen to be a necessary but preliminary precaution by the new ruler, prior to the 'official' senatorial stamp of approval. However, there seems to be little justification in the evidence for assuming such a distinction or for emphasising the importance of any of the recorded elements. If anything, the clear priority in time of the military aspect might indicate its greater significance. In addition even Campbell drew attention to the sarcastic tone of Tacitus' account of Nero's accession, implying that the real power lay with the military; 'The soldiers' verdict was followed by the fathers' decisions'. This assessment of political realities appeared to be confirmed by the depiction of the events that brought Claudius to power. Although we lack Tacitus' account, those of Suetonius and Josephus were such as to make it highly unlikely that the author of the *Annals* would have interpreted matters any more favourably in terms of the senate's real autonomy. Certainly in his

²⁷⁴ **Ceremony:** Amm. Marc. 26. 4. 3. **Marcian and Leo:** Whitby (2000) p. 470; MacCormack p. 243-246. **'Little Boot':** Suet. *Calig.* 9; Cass. Dio 57. 5. 6. **Mutiny:** Tac. *Ann.* 1. 41. 1; Suet. *Calig.* 9. **Ennia Naevia:** Suet. *Galig.* 12.

account of later events in Claudius' reign, Tacitus indicated what he saw as the basis of that emperor's power. During the political crisis attendant upon the 'marriage' of Silius and Messalina in 48 CE, the historian had Claudius' friends advise him that

'...he should go to the army, he should consolidate the Praetorian cohorts, he should consider security before revenge.'

These examples support a view of soldiers as being a recognised element in the establishment and maintenance of an emperor's power..²⁷⁵

Although Campbell piled up evidence to sustain his alternative outlook, much of it seems capable of an interpretation that contradicts his analysis. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that his arguments in support of those views progressively weakened. In dealing with the Emperor Hadrian, he moved from the *de jure/de facto* distinction to citation of the standard criticisms of the SHA as a source. Thus an interesting reference to documentary evidence, Hadrian's letter to the senate apologising for accepting the troops' acclamation as emperor before the fathers had had a chance to decide on the accession, is brushed aside with references to the SHA's senatorial bias and Hadrian's conventional politeness. The letter's reported concluding aphorism, whether authentic or not, may as easily have reflected early second century political realities as those of the source's era, probably three hundred years later. The new ruler explained that his haste '...was due to the belief that the state could not be without an emperor'. Dio's criticism of Didius Julianus for appearing in the senate with an intimidatory force of troops has been described as 'hostile propaganda'. While it is true that neither Herodian nor the SHA was as explicit about the intended role of soldiers on this occasion, both included broadly similar accounts, the former in fact granting only a cursory mention of the senate's role in the Emperor's elevation.²⁷⁶

The same three sources provided accounts of the accession of Macrinus in 217 CE. This involved a letter said to have been written to the senate in circumstances not dissimilar to those of Hadrian. According to Campbell, Cassius Dio (in a particularly uncertain section of his epitomised text) expressed anger because the new emperor had

²⁷⁵ **Gaius:** Campbell (1984) p. 126-127, n. 28, 29. **Avidius Cassius:** Bowman (1970) p. 21-25; Cass. Dio 72. 23. 1. **Campbell:** (1984) p. 378 and (1994) 310. **Nero:** Tac. *Ann.* 12. 69. 1-2; Cass. Dio 61. 3. 1. **Claudius:** Suet. *Claud.* 10; Joseph. *BJ* 204-214; Tac. *Ann.* 11. 31. 1.

²⁷⁶ **Hadrian:** Campbell (1984) p. 378; SHA *Had.* 6. 1-2. **Didius Julianus:** Cass. Dio 74. 12. 1-2; Campbell (1984) p. 379; SHA *Did. Jul.* 4. 3; Herodian. 2. 6. 2, 11-13.

assumed the throne before acceptance by the senate. Although he went on to suggest that the ancient author was well aware of the political reality of Macrinus' reliance on the military, Campbell added by way of conclusion that

‘...it is important that senators did feel even at this date that an emperor should approach them for the formal grant of his titles and powers’.

Perhaps it was wishful thinking on Campbell's part that Cassius Dio's recorded expression of such a sentiment must equate to the reality of the protagonists' views. In fact Dio had already described Macrinus' cautious steps before claiming the throne. These included his careful contacts with military detachments scattered through Mesopotamia and an insistence that ‘it was impious to put a senator to death’. Both Herodian and the SHA indicated Macrinus' stated deference to the senate, but also recorded the Emperor's prior acceptance of the throne from the soldiers. Herodian in fact suggested that after the assassination of Caracalla the army responded to the leadership of Macrinus not

‘...because of the soldiers' affection and loyalty, as from necessity and the urgency of the impending crisis.’

Since this ‘crisis’ took the form of the Persian king, Artabanus, ‘...marching toward the Romans with a huge army’, it could be argued that the soldiers' decision to accept the authority of Macrinus, the general on the spot, could hardly have been more responsive to the best interests of the state.²⁷⁷

For Campbell, as for the ancient sources, the advent of Maximinus in 235 CE provided something of a climax to the series of accessions initiated by the military. This was largely because, in the words of Aurelius Victor, he ‘...was the first common soldier to seize power as the choice of the legions’. Eutropius spelled out the issue; ‘...the authority of the senate played no role and he himself was not a senator.’ Herodian also stressed the ‘lowly station’ of Maximinus and went one step further than he had in the case of Didius Julianus, this time not mentioning the senate at all! In the process of drawing one of his typically moralising conclusions, Aurelius Victor provided significant direct and indirect commentary on this situation. Directly, he identified the death of Severus Alexander and the accession of Maximinus as a watershed of Roman greatness before decline, an assessment largely mirrored in the modern tradition.

²⁷⁷ **Macrinus:** Campbell (1984) p. 379; Cass. Dio 78. 16. 2; *ibid.* 78. 11. 4-5, 12. 2; SHA *Mac.* 6. 1-6; Herodian. 5. 1. 2-8, 4. 14. 3.

Indirectly, Victor reinforced the more specific point about the effects of abandoning legal process ('...when there is universal confusion and nothing is done in its proper manner'), by preceding his judgement with praise of Severus' reliance on renowned jurists to fill senior posts. In this context it must be worth recalling that the official posts held by Victor implied legal training and experience. Modern historians have continued the interpretative assumption that soldiers' involvement must have cut through some standard legal process, for example, in the treatment of Julian's acclamation at Paris in 360 CE.²⁷⁸

In fact the bulk of the evidence on Roman Imperial accessions indicates no consistently applicable legal process to bring a new emperor to the throne. Rather there were a number of important constituencies whose agreement had to be obtained in whatever manner and sequence the circumstances made most appropriate. In that context, the demonstrable temporal primacy of military acclamation probably tells its own story. This view is supported by the priority given to military matters in other contexts. Thus, after noting their origins and parentage, Plutarch introduced Theseus and Romulus as being similar first as warriors, and only then as wise, city founders, rapers of women, unhappy family men and victims of civil unrest. In seeking to identify a strictly legal process of Imperial acclamation, Campbell's problems stemmed from an apparent assumption that soldiers were not one of the relevant constituencies to be won over. This judgement was based on an assessment that the army played an essentially non-political role, or rather that its constituent soldiers could not be regarded as one of the properly political elements of the state. Instead they were viewed as being motivated largely by short-term financial gain, this assessment itself being predicated on observations about the lowly social origins of troops. Evidence for nobler motivations can certainly be extracted from our ancient sources, perhaps more frequently than modern interpretations usually allow. Thus, the role of the urban cohorts and Praetorians in the accession of Claudius has been typically characterised in terms of disloyalty to the senate, self-preservation and greed; this may be correct, but the evidence permits other interpretations. For example, the actions of the urban cohort 'soldier' who forestalled the senate's armed resistance to Claudius' elevation by the

²⁷⁸ **Maximinus:** Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 25; Eutr. 9. 1; Herodian. 6. 9. 5-7. 1. 1. **Watershed:** OCD3 p. 1331. **Legal process:** Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 24. **Julian:** Amm. Marc. 20. 4. 12-19; Hunt 56-58; Lendon (1997) 261-262.

Praetorians may equally have been motivated by a desire to prevent a pointless civil war. Suetonius related a story in which ‘a common soldier’ committed suicide as a sure way to have his news of a defeat believed. The author invested in the significant corroboration of citing the direct observation of his own father to support the veracity of this account. Tacitus reported the similar action of a centurion. Valerius Maximus told a rather complex story about a soldier who refused a lavish reward offered by a rich former slave, but accepted a lesser one from his commander, Scipio Africanus. The moral drawn by the author was, ‘...there is no rank too humble to be affected by the sweetness of glory’. Whatever the scale and pervasiveness of soldiers’ pecuniary motivation, it serves to introduce another element in the interaction between an emperor and his army, that is, the *donativum*.²⁷⁹

The Donative

In addition to his regular pay, the Roman soldier had traditionally received extra financial rewards. At the capture of New Carthage in 209 BCE Polybius described an apparently established and highly organised system by which the victorious army collected and shared booty ‘according to the Roman custom’. During the first century BCE military leaders such as Pompey had distributed huge rewards to their troops. These payments continued during the civil wars, culminating in Augustus’ donation of 1,000 sesterces to each of his 120,000 veterans in 29 BCE. In his will he left money to the Praetorians, urban cohorts and legionaries. Tiberius honoured and doubled these bequests before in turn leaving money to the troops in his own will. Although Suetonius made little of the information, in fact using it in a section suggesting Tiberius’ lack of generosity, it was perhaps a significant development that the Emperor also rewarded troops for their conspicuous loyalty during the crisis over Sejanus. In particular the Praetorians received a large amount of cash, 4,000 sesterces, for not supporting their prefect’s supposed plans for usurpation. Gaius emulated Tiberius’ doubling of his predecessor’s legacies to the soldiers, but perhaps charted new territory as the first ruler to pay a donative on campaign.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ **Similarities:** *Rom.* 1. 3. **Non-political:** Campbell (1984) p. 375. **Motivated by money:** *ibid.* p. 117. **Social status:** *ibid.* p. 9-10. **Claudius’ accession:** Levick (1990) p. 31-33; Joseph. *BJ* 2. 211-214. **Soldier suicides:** Suet. *Otho* 10. 1; Tac. *Hist.* 3. 54. **Reward:** Val. Max. 8. 14. 5.

²⁸⁰ **Rewards:** Polyb. 10. 16; Plut. *Pomp.* 45. 3; RG 15; le Bohec p. 214-217. **Augustus’ will:** Tac. *Ann.* 1.8.2; Suet. *Tib.* 48. **Tiberius:** Suet. *Tib.* 76, 48, 65. **Gaius:** Cass. Dio 59. 2. 3; Suet. *Calig.* 46.

Our sources identified dramatic change with the accession of Claudius. Suetonius declared him to be ‘...the first of the Caesars to have won the loyalty of the soldiers with bribery’ as he promised the Praetorians an unprecedented 15,000 sesterces per man. Despite the unusually direct involvement of those troops in his accession, it seems unlikely that soldiers in the rest of the army were ignored. Nero appeared to follow the precedents set by his predecessors, on his accession promising to the Praetorians ‘...all that Claudius had given them’ and later paying them money in the aftermath of Piso’s conspiracy, ‘...as if to expound achievements in war.’ I will return to Claudius when drawing together the issues of military acclamation and the donative. For the moment, it is clear that special payments to troops were regularly made by emperors and indeed by most pretenders to the throne. The amounts seemed to vary, although the significant but uncertain effects of coin debasement and inflation make comparisons difficult. Nevertheless, the unusually large amount of 20,000 sesterces paid by Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus on their coming to joint power in 161 CE is perhaps worthy of special notice, particularly in relation to that regime’s later financial difficulties. It is true that lacking Cassius Dio or any other more reliable source, we must have recourse to the *Historia Augusta* for the details. However, it is relevant that the author of that source discussed the donatives of other emperors as a matter of routine. For example, he mentioned that of Pertinax no less than three times.²⁸¹

The accession donative of Marcus and Lucius was exceeded in our sources only by that of Didius Julianus. He paid the Praetorians 25,000 sesterces per head in 193 CE. For this act he was described as having purchased the Empire ‘shamefully, disgracefully and fraudulently’ in circumstances of the utmost confusion and irregularity. The situation in 161 CE could hardly have been more different. Hadrian had identified special qualities in Marcus as a boy and had later insisted that Antoninus Pius adopt him when he in turn was adopted as the Emperor’s successor. Thus, as early as 138 CE Marcus Aurelius had appeared destined for the throne:

‘...for he (Hadrian) wished to appoint those who were afterwards to be emperors for as long a time ahead as possible.’

²⁸¹ **Claudius:** Suet. *Claud.* 10. **Other soldiers:** Campbell (1994) p. 166-167. **Nero and precedent:** Cass. Dio 61. 3. 1. **Piso,** Tac. *Ann.* 15. 72. 1. **Other emperors:** Campbell (1984) p. 169-170. **Debasement and inflation:** Burnett p. 105-121. **Marcus Aurelius:** SHA *Marc.* 7. 9. **Financial difficulties:** ibid 17. 4-5. **Pertinax:** SHA *Pert.* 4. 6, 6. 6, 15. 7.

On his deathbed, Antoninus Pius named him as successor and his daughter's future husband. He also transferred to Marcus' apartments the statue of Fortuna '...which was wont to stand in the bed-chamber of the emperor'. In addition, Marcus had already played a progressively larger role as the aging Antoninus declined in health. After Antoninus' long reign there were no immediate external threats to Rome and, 'The armies were restrained by the firm but gentle hand of...successive emperors'. In short, it is hard to bring to mind another accession about which there was less doubt or a greater consensus, or which took place more smoothly. In this context, scholars have found it difficult to understand the apparent generosity of the donative in 161 CE. It has been described as an 'expensive ceremony...(that) was not perhaps immediately necessary.' Suggestions that a double donative constituted 'useful insurance' convey little more than a determination to put forward some plausible explanation. The reflection that:

'It was emperors who desperately needed military support who had to make promises of this kind...'

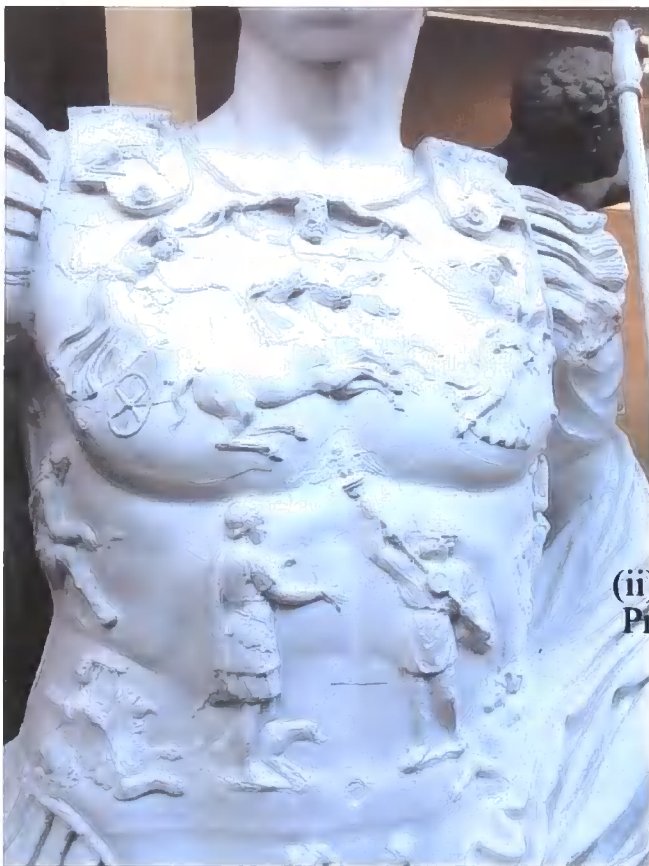
should lead to alternative analyses. Perhaps another rather bald suggestion from the same source, that a double accession required a double donative, holds the possibility of greater illumination. Although the point is left unexplored it may be that an unusual accession called for more than usually careful political handling of the army.²⁸²

Part of the problem possibly resides in the mindset reflected in Birley's use of the term 'ceremony'. Campbell employed the same word in relation to the donative of Gaius and he used it again when referring to a scene depicted on Trajan's Column (**Plate 22 i**). It seems highly likely that a ceremonial element would be built into such an event where possible. Also the occasion would inevitably develop its own forms of correctness and display. Nevertheless, I detect in the usage of both Birley and Campbell a sense of the 'merely ceremonial' as opposed to the politically legitimate/acceptable. Despite their intrinsic bias in favour of the senate, the ancient sources may have betrayed a different feel for the balance of events. Thus, in 161 CE Marcus and Lucius

²⁸² **Didius Julianus:** Herodian. 2. 6. 12; Cass. Dio 74. 11. 3. **Marcus:** SHA *Marc.* 1. 10; **Hadrian:** Cass. Dio 69. 21. 1; **Antoninus Pius:** SHA *Ant. Pius* 12. 5-6; Birley (1987) p. 114. **Restrained armies:** Gibbon Ch. III 'Happiness of the Romans' p. 95. **Expensive ceremony/emperors needing military support/double accession:** Birley (1987) p. 117-118.



(i) Trajan's
'ceremonial' adlocutio



(ii) and (iii):
Prima Porta



(iv) Augustus
BMC 418



‘...when they had done those things which had to be done in the presence of the senate, they set out together for the Praetorian camp’, perhaps conveying a meaning of ‘after some necessary preliminaries, the real task (of confirming the will of the soldiers) was undertaken’. In a similar vein, for his initial address to the senate, Nero had reminded the assembled fathers that he had already obtained the soldiers’ consensus.²⁸³

It may well be that the donative was a more politically complex phenomenon than is suggested by its characterisation as either a routine ceremony or a bribe. A cryptic comment in Cassius Dio could provide support for this view. After a major victory against Germans who had threatened Italy itself, Marcus was said to have refused his soldiers’ demand for a special donative, arguing that anything beyond their normal payments would have to be ‘...wrung from the blood of their parents and kinsmen.’ He is then said to have continued ‘...as for the fate of the sovereignty, Heaven alone could determine that’. This event probably took place in the spring of 170 CE. Lucius Verus had died a year previously and even though Marcus’ younger son, Verus, had also just died, it is hard to see why there should have been any threat to the throne at that point. Cassius Dio’s juxtaposition of a refused donative and a question mark over the sovereignty may of course have reflected his experience and prejudices about soldiers and politics (see pages 218-219). In a similar vein, ancient commentators had seen it as necessary to seek a reason for Galba’s failure to pay a special donative on the ill-fated adoption of Calpurnius Piso as his successor in 69 CE. Suetonius appeared to view the matter merely as a political blunder that opened the way for Otho to usurp the throne five days later. Tacitus, on the other hand, gave the issue greater attention. Bearing in mind his generally negative attitude to soldiers’ involvement in politics, it is interesting that he seemed to see the absence of a donative (which he defined as ‘bounty and bribery’, and thus an ‘immoral’ way of gaining their ‘goodwill’) as legitimising the role of troops in a clearly political occasion. These examples, then, may relate to the wider political significance of the donative. Illumination may be derived from the idea that the donative represented a gesture recognising a special relationship. Such a relationship has been hinted at by modern scholars, for example, in viewing the donative as a mechanism for inspiring gratitude within a wider system of benefits and

²⁸³ **Merely ceremonial:** Campbell (1984) p. 126-127, 183. **Military precedence:** SHA *Marc.* 7. 9; Tac. *Ann.* 13. 4.

obligations. As far as ancient evidence is concerned, it is noteworthy that Herodian identified the accession of Didius Julianus in 193 CE as the occasion on which ‘...the Praetorians were corrupted for the first time’. Although not usually credited with great political insight, it is hard to believe that this historian was unaware of the recorded behaviour of the Imperial guards when other emperors had come to the throne, illustrated by comments such as those of Suetonius regarding Claudius.²⁸⁴

The emperor’s image on military standards

Within the operation of acclamation and the donative, concentration has been on the examination of evidence for an overtly political dimension in the army’s role. Analysis has suggested that such a dimension did exist, providing support for a view that the rule the emperors was characterised by a strongly coercive element. The analysis can be strengthened by evidence of individual and personal aspects of the relationship between the emperor and his troops. This was manifest in a number of significant ways. Amongst these, and bridging the political and the personal, was the use of Imperial images on military standards, particularly in relation to changes of regime.

An illustration of the traditional status of a legion’s standard was provided by Livy. In the context of Scipio’s capture of New Carthage in 210 BCE, the historian had rival military units use their standards in a sacred oath concerning claims to achievements during the fighting. Exaggerating for the sake of rhetorical effect, Tertullian declared that a soldier

‘...venerated the standards, swore by the standards, set the standards
before all the gods.’

Like Tertullian, interpreting this status and respect from a Christian standpoint, John Chrysostom equated St Paul’s role as representative of Christ with that of standard-bearing soldiers as agents of the emperor. It was certainly true that the eagle represented the spirit of a legion and was treated with great respect, being housed in the camp shrine. That it could take on a wider political and psychological significance was nowhere better illustrated than in the emphasis placed by Augustus on the recovery of standards. Lost to the Parthians by Crassus thirty-three years earlier, legionary

²⁸⁴ **Donative and sovereignty:** Cass. Dio 71. 3. 3-4; OCD3 p. 220. **Benefits and obligations:** Lendon (1997) p. 257; see also, Flaig; Lintott (1994) p. 131 suggested that such an analysis may be overstated. **Galba:** Suet. *Galb.* 17; Tac. *Hist.* 1. 17; Coulston p. 98. **Didius Julianus:** Herodian 2. 6. 14; **Claudius:** Suet. *Claud* 10..

standards were returned by means of diplomatic pressure in 20 BCE. From today's perspective, and indeed in the view of Cassius Dio, there must have been exaggeration involved in claiming this event as a military victory. Nevertheless, its real importance may well reflect both the significance to the Romans of obtaining deference from others and the intrinsic ideological value placed on the standards. Both explanations appear necessary to justify the prominence of the occasion in iconography (**Plate 22 ii-iv**) and in the weight given to the return of these standards, and others from Spain, Gaul and Dalmatia, in Augustus' account of his achievements. The *Res Gestae* stated that the recovered standards were placed in the Temple of Mars *Ulpior*. By so doing Augustus added to the religious significance of legionary insignia and thus to their over-all importance. Support for the standards' ideological role can be found in Livy's account of an important occasion in Roman myth/history. On returning to the ruins of Rome after its sack by the Gauls in 390 BCE, the senate was on the point of deciding to abandon the site and migrate to Veii, when a centurion's cry was heard from outside the Curia Hostilia, "Standard-bearers, fix your ensign; here will be our best place to remain". This chance order was interpreted as an omen and decided the debate. The ideological function of the military standards is given extra weight by the association between the implied re-founding of the City in this story and the significance of Augustus' image as a second founder.²⁸⁵

Such a context gives added relevance to the fact that images of the emperor were portrayed on the legionary standards. Examples can still be seen of Trajan on reliefs from his Column, and of Septimius Severus on the Arch of the Argentarii (**Plate 23 i and ii**). Literary references reinforce the importance of these likenesses. In line with their use in Augustan diplomacy described above, military insignia and Imperial images were combined in relations between Rome and the Parthian king, Artabanus. In the reign of Gaius, that foreign monarch was reported to have

'...crossed the Euphrates to offer his respects to the eagles and standards of Rome and to the portraits of the Caesars.'

However, it was perhaps in the context of violent changes of regime that the association could be seen to operate most clearly. As a dramatic indication of Otho's

²⁸⁵ **Respect for the military standard:** Livy 26. 48. 12; Tert. *Apol.* 16. 8. **John Chrysostom:** Ando p. 259); Herodian 4. 4. 4; Ando p. 259-265. **Parthians:** Cassius Dio 54. 8; RG 29. **Gauls:** Livy 5. 55. 1.



(i) Trajan's Column



(ii) Arch of Argentarii

military coup against Galba in 69 CE, Tacitus described the act of the standard bearer of the latter's guard as he

‘...tore off the effigy of Galba and flung it to the ground. This signal clearly showed that all the troops were for Otho.’

The significance of this act beyond its immediate context was increased by the historian calling on ‘tradition’ to support his record of the name of this standard bearer. Such an explicit evocation of the collective memory elevates the importance of the account. At a later stage in the civil wars of 68-69 CE, the soldiers of Vitellius were reported as demonstrating a shift of loyalty to Vespasian by removing the former's images from their standards. The general association between military standards and the emperors was illustrated in Tacitus' account of the *Civilis* episode during the same crisis. At one point:

‘The emperors' medallions had been torn down and their standards desecrated...’.

The points of particular interest here are the reference to representations of more than one emperor and the fact that the standards, so closely associated with the legions, are said to belong to the emperors. This iconic significance of the juxtaposition of eagles and portraits of the emperors surely justifies Campbell's conclusion that:

‘To smash and tear down the imperial *imagines* was not casual vandalism, but a gesture of political and military disloyalty to the reigning emperor, and indeed almost a formal indication of revolt’

Confirmation of this special element in the relationship between an emperor and his soldiers can be found in the application of the *maiestas* law. The penalty laid down for a soldier who defaced an Imperial portrait was more severe than that for a civilian. This distinction serves to introduce wider aspects of the legal and social position of soldiers. The evidence will reveal related personal and legal elements of the emperors' close connection with the army, demonstrating his identification with the troops and emphasising his reliance on military support.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ **Imperial images on standards:** Suet. *Calig.* 14; Cassius Dio (59. 27. 3) described the role of images of Augustus and Gaius in this incident, but made no explicit mention of military standards. **Otho and Galba:** *Hist.* 1. 41. **Vitellius and Vespasian:** Cassius Dio 64. 10. 3; Tacitus *Hist.* 2. 85; 3. 13. **Civilis:** *ibid.* *Hist.* 4. 62. **Revolt:** Campbell (1984) p. 99. ***Maiestas*:** Dig. 48. 4. 7. 4.

Emperor and Soldiers: a very personal relationship

In response to considerable Roman casualties during the Jewish uprising of 132 CE, the Emperor Hadrian was said to have altered the usual opening of an emperor's letter to the senate. According to the epitomator of Cassius Dio, the greeting 'commonly affected' ran thus, "If you and your children are in health, it is well; I and the legions are in health". A specific use of this familial rhetoric was ascribed to Commodus. In addressing the troops at the start of his reign, the young emperor stated his conviction that his father

'...took greater delight...in calling me "fellow soldier" than in calling me "son", for he considered the latter a title bestowed by Nature, the former, a partnership based on excellence'.

The depth of the emperor's feelings towards his soldiers could certainly be reciprocated. In an important section of his narrative, Velleius Paterculus announced his arrival as an officer under Tiberius in the German campaign of 4 CE. The author, in full panegyrical style, proceeded to gild the lily of his own praise of the newly adopted heir of Augustus. He recounted the passionate responses of the soldiers:

'...tears which sprang to their eyes at the sight of him... "Is it really you that we see, commander? Have we received you safely back among us?"'.

In a tellingly incidental detail, Valerius Maximus suggested the physical union of his most revered Roman leader, Julius Caesar, and the soldiers under his command; he described them as '...the unconquered right hand of the unconquered general.' The intimacy between emperors and their soldiers advertised by such examples requires no underlining. In the following, consideration will be given to various features characterising that close relationship: the soldiers' oath; nomenclature of the emperor and of his legions; and military aspects of the emperor's formal and informal behaviour.²⁸⁷

The Military Oath

Dionysius of Halicarnassus declared the soldier's oath of allegiance, the *sacramentum*, to be the most strictly observed of all Roman oaths. The seriousness of the vow must have been bolstered by its heavily religious character. This was intrinsic to its Latin

²⁸⁷ **Parental rhetoric:** Cass. Dio 69. 14. 3; Herodian 1. 5. 3. **Tiberius:** Vell. Pat. 2. 104. 3-4. **Julius Caesar:** Val. Max. 7. 6. 5.

name and can be seen on coinage, such as a sestertius of Domitian showing Emperor and soldier shaking hands over an altar. Herodian also referred to it as ‘...that sacred rite of the Roman Empire’ and it played a significant role in what has been called the Roman army’s ‘highly sacralised community’. Although in fact describing Samnite practice, Livy provided detail of the duty, mystery and awe surrounding the ceremony of the military oath. In the Roman context Livy stated that the oath had ancient origins in voluntary undertakings made by troops to their commander and in their individual units. He reported that this informal procedure had been replaced by a

‘...formal oath, administered by the general officers, to the effect that they would assemble for service on the consuls’ orders’.

Although the historian did not make the point explicitly, it was probably significant that this change took place in 216 BCE during the crisis caused by Hannibal’s invasion of Italy. Be that as it may, later crises certainly influenced the development of the *sacramentum*. The oath had always been sworn to named magistrates of the Republic. However, in the military and political turmoil of the first century BCE it received a more decidedly personal emphasis. Before embarking for Brundisium in 84 BCE, Sulla’s troops were said to have sworn ‘...to stand by him and to do no damage in Italy except by his orders (my emphasis)’. Plutarch stressed the ominous nature of this event by immediately preceding it with the fantastic story of Sulla’s horror at the failure of a captured satyr (‘just like those represented by sculptors and painters’) to communicate anything intelligible. In the account he gave of his struggle for supremacy against Pompey, Julius Caesar highlighted the significance of the *sacramentum* in determining to whom particular bodies of troops were loyal.²⁸⁸

Despite carefully claiming to have acted in a way that ‘championed the liberty of the Republic’, Augustus could not have been clearer in pointing to the personal nature of the oath:

‘The Roman citizens who took the soldier’s oath of obedience to me numbered about 500,000.’

I do not intend to enter into the debate about the genuineness or otherwise of Tiberius’ wish to return to more Republican forms of government. However, it is noteworthy that

²⁸⁸ **Strictly observed oath:** Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 11. 43. 2; OCD3 p. 1343. **Altar:** BMC Domitian 301; Herodian. 8. 7. 4; Lendon (1997) p. 253. **Samnites:** Livy 10. 38. **Origins:** ibid. 22. 38. **Crises:** Plut. *Sull.* 27. 3. **Caesar:** *B Civ.* 2. 32.

in Cassius Dio's account he was already surrounded by loyal troops when he parried a facetious suggestion that he be given an official bodyguard with the statement that, 'The soldiers do not belong to me, but to the State.' To reinforce the real point, Cassius Dio ensured that this comment was fixed into a context in which he had detailed the Emperor's predilection for never saying what he really thought; in fact '...his words indicated the exact opposite of his real purpose'. In case the meaning was still not clear, Dio immediately followed Tiberius' remark about the soldiers with an example of his subject's duplicity:

'...he was administering in reality all the business of the Empire while declaring that he did not want it at all'.

In the next chapter Cassius Dio indicated the actual situation. Tiberius

'...had previously made sure of the soldiers in Italy by means of the oaths of allegiance established by Augustus.'²⁸⁹

Tacitus provided an interesting perspective on the issue in his account of legions swearing loyalty to 'the senate and people of Rome' rather than to Galba as a named *princeps*. The historian pointedly referred to the troops' chosen wording as 'obsolete' and clearly implied that it concealed their actual partisanship for Vitellius. Of the alternative versions, Suetonius gave an account of the occasion in the context of the German legions' dissatisfaction with Galba. Although the biographer reported without comment that the soldiers '...refused to swear their oath...unless it was in the name of the senate', he immediately described their decision to send a delegation to Rome to seek an emperor '...who would be approved of by the armies'. Plutarch invoked what he saw as the 'lawless spirit' of the troops in explaining their refusal to swear to Galba, again noting their alternative oath 'to the senate and people of Rome'. It is striking that in this context he referred to the declined Imperial oath as being 'customary'. Cassius Dio did not mention the oath incident at all; instead, with characteristic disdain for their motives, he merely reported that the soldiers had failed to get any favour from Galba and therefore '...sought to obtain it under some other leader'. It may well be the case that, as a focus for their oath of loyalty, SPQR provided the German legions with nothing more than 'a convenient political slogan'. However, if authentic, the occurrence suggested clear knowledge on the part of the military, not only of the

²⁸⁹ **Tiberius and the Republic:** See Levick (1999a) p. 76ff. **Real situation:** Cass. Dio 57. 1. 1 - 3. 2.

basically personal nature of their allegiance, but also of an awareness of the political significance of that allegiance in relation to alternative loyalties. Perhaps more straightforwardly, Tacitus' account of the earliest moves in the elevation of the next emperor gave pride of place to the soldiers' oath:

‘The move to confer the throne on Vespasian began at Alexandria, where Tiberius Alexander with great promptitude administered the oath of allegiance to his troops on 1 July. This was later celebrated as his day of accession’.²⁹⁰

Other evidence from the Imperial period, although not plentiful, confirms the nature of the *sacramentum* as loyalty to the person of a particular emperor. Plutarch underlined this feature of the oath during the crisis that led to the end of Galba's reign. During the confused fighting in Rome, a soldier forced his way into Galba's presence brandishing a bloodied sword and shouting that he had killed an enemy of Caesar. The emperor asked him on whose orders he had shed this blood. Plutarch had the soldier reply ‘...that it was his fidelity and the oath he had sworn’. Epictetus referred to new recruits swearing ‘...an oath to value the safety of the emperor above everything’. In three of his letters Pliny reported to Trajan that the oath of loyalty had been re-administered on the anniversary of his accession. The Emperor's warm replies attested to the personal nature of this ceremony and his use of the expression *commilitones* (‘comrades/fellow-soldiers’) reinforced the closeness of the relationship.²⁹¹

“My fellow-soldiers”

Trajan's personalised references to his soldiers presumably reflected his particularly long and close relationship with them. Pliny's claim that the subject of his panegyric had spent ten of his formative years in the army may well be exaggerated, although the future emperor certainly had extensive and varied experience of military life. Nevertheless, it appears that Trajan was by no means the first Roman leader to use this form of address. Suetonius felt it to be worthy of note that Julius Caesar referred to his soldiers as *commilitones* rather than *milites*. He added the editorial comment that, in so doing, Caesar was flattering the troops. From his early second century CE perspective,

²⁹⁰ Tacitus: *Hist.* 1. 55, 57. Suetonius: *Galb.* 16. Plutarch: *Galb.* 22. 3-4. Cassius Dio: 64. 4. 1. Campbell (2002b) p. 110. Slogan: Wellesley p. 15. Vespasian: *Hist.* 2. 79.

²⁹¹ Galba's loyal soldier: Plut. *Galb.* 26. 1-2. New recruits: Arr. *Epict. Diss.* 1. 14. 15. Trajan: Plin. *Ep.* 10. 35, 36, 52, 53, 100, 101.

Suetonius may have been reflecting distaste for soldiers' involvement in politics similar to that of Tacitus. Writing a little later in the same century, Appian, a historian of pronounced conservative and monarchist leanings, identified as a fatal blow to concord and stability a situation in which soldiers fought

‘...not against the common enemy, but against private foes...lending assistance...to leaders who needed them for their own personal ends.’²⁹²

Such an assessment was said by Suetonius to lie behind Augustus' reported decision, taken after 31 BCE, that the personal commitment suggested by *commilitones* language was inappropriate in the official pronouncements of the newly stabilised *res publica*. The biographer added the convincing circumstantial detail that the *princeps* forbade his family to employ such terms while they were holding military office. Nevertheless, Quintilian had included an example of Augustus using *commilito* in direct conversation with a soldier. A story was included by Cassius Dio in which the first *princeps* was shamed into making an appearance in court on behalf of a soldier. The trooper's response to Augustus' initial disinclination to attend in person was recorded as:

‘But whenever you needed my help, I did not send somebody else to act in my place, I came myself and faced the danger’.

It must be reasonable to assume that a riposte of this quality represented either Cassius Dio's literary source or the product of his own early third century CE imagination. In either case, or indeed if the quotation was authentic to its setting of about 9 BCE, the incident as reported adds useful weight to a view of the perceived closeness of an emperor and his soldiers. Even if the firmly established first *princeps* made efforts to avoid signs of over-familiarity with soldiers

‘...it was he who established the idea of the army as a specially privileged group, requiring particular attention from the emperor.’

The idea of there being a personal relationship between emperor and his soldiers can find support in wider evidence. The bond between a Roman commander and his troops can certainly be seen to go beyond the loyalty of each party towards the state. According to Plutarch, during his campaign in Italy against Hannibal, Fabius Maximus negotiated an exchange of prisoners. A ransom sum was agreed in the event of the numbers not being equal. Foreshadowing its response after Cannae, the Roman senate

²⁹² **Trajan:** Plin. *Pan.* 15. 3; Bennett p. 23. **Caesar:** Suet. *Jul.* 67; Caes. *B Civ.* 5. 17.

refused to ratify the payment of money to effect the return of men whose capture it regarded as having demonstrated their cowardice. Fabius, however, sold his property in Rome to raise the money himself, refusing any later repayment by the ransomed men.²⁹³

There is no direct evidence that Tiberius or any later emperor before the civil wars of 68-69 CE addressed soldiers as *commilitones*. However, in the reigns of all the Julio-Claudians, with the significant exception of Nero, the sentiment if not the language can be demonstrated. During the mutinies of 14 CE Drusus read a letter from Tiberius to the unsettled troops. In it the Emperor alluded to the fact that he had shared the soldiers' hardships on campaign. Mention has already been made of some of the elements linking Gaius with the army (pages 231-232). As emperor he developed these into eccentric, self-conferred titles, for example, 'Son of the Camp' and 'Father of the Forces'. The extraordinary circumstances of his accession and his lack of military experience provided Claudius with a special need to emphasise his relationship with the army. Coins depicting him shaking hands with a soldier and including legends denoting mutual acceptance illustrated the point. The glamour of Nero's blood relationship to Augustus may be one explanation for the soldiers' residual loyalty towards him after his death. Even during the early stages of the revolts in 68 CE many of the German legions were slow to move against their emperor. During his reign he appeared to show no consistent effort to cultivate the army, although an interesting exception possibly proved the rule. Nero's designation of certain legions as 'his crack troops' was cited by Tacitus as a reason for their relative enthusiasm for the Emperor. This detail invites speculation about the grip on power that Nero might have achieved had he devoted more attention to such matters. However, against such a minor positive instance was the general perversion of military values evident in many of the Emperor's major activities. Notable here were the travesties of triumphs held to celebrate his entry to Rome on the death of his mother in 59 CE, the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy in 65, his reception of Tiridates in 66 and return from the artistic tour of Greece in 68. It must be germane to a consideration of the political role of soldiers that *commilitones* language became prominent if not standard in our sources for the civil wars of 68-69 CE. Campbell stated it to be '...the usual form of address to soldiers' during that

²⁹³ **Family usage:** Suet. *Aug.* 25; Campbell (1984) p. 33-34. **Augustus:** Quint. *Inst.* 6. 3. 95; Cass. Dio 55. 4. 2. **Army as privileged group:** Campbell (1984) p. 283. Fabius Maximus: Plut. *Fab. Max.* 7. 3-5.

period. Tacitus gave the term prominence in the introductory exhortations of paired speeches by Piso (on behalf of Galba) and by Otho.²⁹⁴

Sources such as Josephus, Cassius Dio and Herodian recorded the Greek equivalent of *commilitones* (*sustratiotai*) being commonly used by Roman leaders/emperors in the first, second and third centuries. Josephus employed the word in the introduction of a speech by Titus, and Dio had Marcus Aurelius use the term three times at rhetorically important points in a speech to soldiers. The fact that this oration took place in the context of the revolt of Avidius Cassius possibly gave the language greater significance. Instances in Herodian included the use of *commilitones* language by Macrinus and Severus Alexander, and Caracalla's seeming pleasure at being so addressed by the soldiers themselves. Usages by, for example, Plato and Aristotle, indicate that these commanders were employing, not some special form of address, but language that could be applied to any group of soldiers.²⁹⁵

The potency and political resonance of *commilitones* language becomes evident when it was deliberately withheld. The example from which others undoubtedly derived was attributed to Julius Caesar. It was recounted that he had responded to the indiscipline and unreasonable demands of the tenth legion by confronting them and addressing them as 'Quirites' (citizens, civilians). The troops were immediately shamed into obedience, the incident illustrating a consciousness, at least on the part of ancient authors, of an important distinction between soldiers and civilians. That the importance of this language had been absorbed into the historical tradition (and possibly also the military/political tradition) can be seen in its use by Tacitus and later authors. Thus, Julius Caesar's rebuke was quoted by Germanicus as he attempted to quell the mutiny of the first and twentieth legions in 14 CE. The late fourth century author of the SHA included a substantial passage describing Severus Alexander in a similar predicament. Although this author is not usually credited with profound political analysis and

²⁹⁴ **Tiberius:** Campbell (1984) p. 35-36; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 25. 3. **Gaius:** Suet. *Calig.* 22. **Claudius:** BMC Claudius 5, 8. **Nero - residual loyalty:** Tac. *Hist.* 2. 11. **German legions:** Griffin (1984) p. 185. **Enthusiasm:** Tac. *Hist.* 2. 11. **Perverted triumphs:** Griffin (1984) p. 230-231. **Civil wars:** See, for example, Tac. *Hist.* 1. 83 and Plut. *Galb.* 27. 3; Campbell (1984) p. 36. **Piso:** Tac. *Hist.* 1. 29, 37.

²⁹⁵ **Titus:** Joseph. *BJ* 6. 34. **Marcus Aurelius:** Cass. Dio 72. 24. 1, 25. 1, 26. 1; Campbell (1984) p. 38. **Macrinus:** Herodian 4. 14. 4. **Severus Alexander:** ibid. 6. 3. 3. **Commodus:** ibid. 1. 5. 3-4; Lendon (1997) p. 253-254. **Caracalla:** Herodian 4. 7. 6. **Ordinary usage:** Pl. *Resp.* 556c; Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1159b28; Liddell and Scott p. 1736.

insight, his account is of interest here. The Emperor was described as dealing with a situation in which mutiny threatened because he had arrested disorderly troops. He opened his initial address to the resentful legionaries with a resounding '*Commilitones*', going on to refer to the arrested troops as '...your companions, my comrades and fellow soldiers'. This appeal failing, as did a reminder to the soldiers that they were threatening '...him who gives you rations...clothing and pay', Alexander discharged them with the single word '*Quirites*'; not only this, but he went on to question whether they could even be called 'citizens', since they were flouting Rome's laws. He thus identified the soldiers as a distinct element of the *res publica*, threatening that, should they kill him,

'...the state and the senate and the Roman people will not lack someone to take vengeance for me upon you.'

The sudden and 'marvellous' effect of this approach by the Emperor prompted editorial comment from the author that '...it illustrated how much could be accomplished by ...strictness and discipline'. However fictional or derivative of Julius Caesar's account this may be, various elements of the Severus Alexander story serve to indicate a number of themes relevant to this thesis: the ideology of a close and personal relationship between emperor and his soldiers; a perception of the interconnected but distinct roles of the senate, people and army in the Roman state; and our elite sources' attitude that the soldiers must be kept under tight control.²⁹⁶

Formal nomenclature

In addition to the informal linguistic usages between an emperor and his soldiers, more formal aspects also revealed the bond between the two. The battlefield origins of the term *imperator* have already been indicated (page 230). Literary sources named Julius Caesar as the first to use the title on a permanent basis. Cassius Dio reported that the senate bestowed on

'...him first and for the first time, as a kind of proper name, the title of *imperator (autokrator)*'.

The historian explicitly stated that it had formerly been earned in war and that the senate's purpose was 'excessive flattery'. Although Suetonius also included an account of this episode in a section listing Caesar's 'excessive honours', no coin or inscription

²⁹⁶ **Withholding *commilitones* language:** Suet. *Iul.* 70; App. *B. Civ.* 2. 92-94; Tac. *Ann.* 1. 42. 3; SHA *Alex Sev.* 52. 3, 53. 1-54. 6.

confirms the nomenclature. Cassius Dio indicated his anachronistic early third century perspective by adding that

‘...the same title is...now granted to all those who hold successively the supreme power.’

A little earlier, and in a similar vein, a reference to an episode in the life of Scipio Africanus had illustrated this changed outlook. Around 200 CE the compiler of geographical commonplaces, C. Iulius Solinus, retold a story of the great general’s acclamation as king by Spaniards and Carthaginians in the act of submitting to him. In Polybius’ account, Scipio dutifully rejected the title (*basileias*), reminding the second group that *imperator* was the grandest honour acceptable to Romans. Livy included a similar version, transmitting *basileus* as *rex*. However, Solinus revealed the later merging of all these expressions by his rendition of the unacceptable term as *caesar*. Thus the earlier, subtly shifting uses and meanings of *imperator* and *imperium* no longer had any real political resonance. The former had its origins in the honouring of a commander by his troops, recognising leadership in an outstanding military achievement. The latter was rooted in the authority vested in magistrates by the Roman people. However, in phrases such as *imperium populi Romani* it was frequently stretched to denote the collective power of the Roman people in relation to others. For example, Livy included the terms of a treaty imposed by the Romans on the Aetolian Greeks in 189 BCE. Its opening demand required that:

‘The Aetolian people shall maintain the sovereignty and majesty of the Roman people (*imperium maiestatemque populi*) with all good faith.’

Again in 169 BCE he had the consul, Q. Marcius Philippus, address his troops about the fate that awaited their opponent, Perseus, as he challenged ‘...the Roman people, who now controlled the whole earth’. Augustus, in the careful handling of his exceptional powers in the context of traditional Republican political forms, showed an awareness of the sensitivity surrounding these terms. Nevertheless reflecting the moves towards autocracy that characterised his reign, the language and ideology of collective power (*imperium populi Romani*) swung towards that of a grander, depersonalised entity (*Imperium Romanum*), the direction of which became the prerogative of the supreme leader.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ **Imperator as a name:** Cass. Dio 43. 44. 2-5; Suet. *Iul.* 76; Syme (1958a) p. 176. **Scipio and Solinus:** Polyb. 10. 38, 40; Livy 27. 19. 3-6; OCD3 p. 786; Millar (1992) p. 613. **Aetolians:** Livy 38. 11. 2. **Perseus:** *ibid.* 44. 1. 12. See Koebner p. 1-17 for an account of the amalgamation and

It is undoubtedly the case that an important element of Augustus' policy was based on the desire to distance himself from the military methods by which the principate was established. However, in summarising the early part of his career he claimed that he was saluted *imperator* twenty-one times. In fact Augustus went so far as to adopt *imperator* as a *praenomen*, coins appearing with that legend in 38 BCE. Syme, having characteristically satisfied himself that the adoption of the name did not imply any claim to special legal authority, nevertheless passed brief and accurate judgement on the usage. It was '...exorbitant, far outshining any predecessor or competitor.' The refusal by both Tiberius and Claudius to adopt the name seems likely to have been related to a perception that it was an 'unconstitutional' novelty. Within that analysis must have been calculations about the effectiveness and acceptability of acknowledging the established political role of the army. Following the military upheavals of 68-69 CE no such scruples were evident; Vespasian's *Imperator Caesar Vespasianus Augustus* becoming the pattern for subsequent emperors. Also in the Flavian period, the connection became more firmly established between the name/title '*Imperator*' and real power. As younger brother to Titus, it was to an extent natural that Domitian should play the role of junior partner during the reign of their father, Vespasian. Of the three members of the dynasty, he held fewer in total and more suffect consulships. When his father and brother were carried through the streets on sedan chairs, Domitian followed using the less prestigious transport of a litter. While his absence from the campaign explains his minor role in the Judean triumph, it is notable that Domitian received no formal acclamation for the military exploits that he did undertake, achieving his first title as *Imperator* only on his accession after Titus' death in 81 CE. Although the matter is uncertain, it is arguable that the earlier lack of this title indicated a deliberate policy of distancing the younger Flavian from executive power.²⁹⁸

Some of the emperor's honorific titles were also relevant to his relationship with the army. The *cognomina ex virtute* shared the Republican origins of *imperator*. These were derived from the names of towns or peoples conquered by particular generals.

transformation of *Imperator* and *Imperium*, especially p. 11. But see Isaac (1992) p. 395 for a different view.

²⁹⁸ **Augustus:** RG 4. 1; Grueber p. 411; Syme (1958a) p. 182. **Novelty:** Suet. *Tib.* 62, *Claud.* 12; Campbell (1984) p. 94. **Army's political role:** Campbell (2002b) p. xiii-xiv; Peachin p. 1-2. **Flavians:** Jones, B. p. 18-21; Suet. *Dom.* 2; Levick (1999) p. 188-189, 200.

The honour of adding such a title to his name could become hereditary. Thus, after his triumphs in the First Punic War, M. Valerius Maximus Messalla acquired the last part of his name in recognition of his securing Messana in Sicily. In a similar fashion, P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus earned his extra *cognomen* after his victory over the Carthaginians at Zama in 204 BCE. His adoptive grandson, P. Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus inherited the name and even added to it an unofficial *Numantinus* in recognition of his own 134 BCE achievements in Spain. Awareness of the political prestige attached to these honours is noticeable both in the frequency of the emperors' acquisition of such names and in sensitivity to their genuine military origins. Most obtained an honorific title referring to victory in war. For Gaius, Claudius and Nero, the name *Germanicus* had a hereditary element, although its adoption must have been seen as useful to those unmilitary emperors. This latter explanation may also have accounted for Vitellius' adoption of the name in 69 CE. True to their characters in our literary sources, Marcus Aurelius was recorded as being careful about his use of *cognomina ex virtute*, in contrast with his son, Commodus. Marcus accepted the use of *Parthicus Maximus* during the period that Lucius Verus, the author of the exploits on which the title was based, ruled with him as joint emperor. After the latter's death, however, Marcus reverted to *Germanicus*, a title related to his personal involvement in war. Commodus accepted *Britannicus* as a *cognomen* even though he was not present at the relevant victories of Ulpius Marcellus in 184 CE.²⁹⁹

In an evocation of Scipio Aemilianus' *Numantinus*, Peachin noted that documentary sources tended to credit third century emperors with victory titles for which no authoritative official sanction can be found, for example from coins of the Roman mint. For his purpose, (the use of such titles to indicate a chronology), this provided a difficulty. However, as a demonstration of the breadth and depth of those emperors' claimed associations with military success, the high frequency of victory ascriptions and the wide variety of their sources are still significant. Examples from the large pool available include: Maximinus Thrax as *Sarmaticus* on a military discharge diploma; Trajan Decius credited with *Dacicus* and *Germanicus* on milestones in Spain and Pannonia; and *Arabicus*, *Britannicus* and *Persicus* amongst no less than twelve different such names linked to Aurelian. Sources for these included the SHA, coins and

²⁹⁹ **Honorific titles:** OCD3 p. 1025, 1579, 398, 397. **Emperors:** Campbell (1984) p. 128-129. **Marcus:** SHA *Marc.* 12. 9. **Commodus:** Cass. Dio 73. 8. 2.

various papyri. More generally, *Invictus* (unconquered) became a regular Imperial title from the reign of Gordian III. Although an element of honours ‘inflation’ operated here as in the names of the legions (see below), the process could still be taken seriously. Macrinus was described as being too ashamed to accept the title of *Parthicus*, because he had not been victorious in his wars in the east. It was reported to be a joke on the part of Aurelian that after victory over the Carpi, a relatively minor Danubian tribe, he refused the title *Carpisculus*, because of its punning association with a word for a boot. Nevertheless, the incident indicated a serious hierarchy of such names, with precedence being ascribed to the likes of *Gothicus* and *Parthicus*.³⁰⁰

Nomenclature could also play a significant role in cementing a particular legion’s relationship with the emperor. The size, nature and individual identity of a Roman Imperial legion largely derived from the military reforms carried out by Marius in the early first century BCE. It was at that time that the eagle standard was adopted, symbolising the spirit of the unit. Developed into a standing professional force by Augustus, this structure remained stable until Diocletian’s reorganisation towards the end of the third century. Originally designated only by numerals, recruitment by the contenders in the civil wars of the first century BCE brought confusion to this system and led to identification through nicknames. These often derived from the area in which a legion had been raised or had met with conspicuous success, for example, *Legio III Gallica* (formed from veterans of Caesar’s Gallic wars) and *V Macedonica* (raised in 43 BCE by Augustus for service in Macedonia). Such distinctions could become attached to legions as long as they functioned as distinct units. Various types of nomenclature demonstrated links to the emperor. Some were straightforwardly derived from his name, such as the *II* and *VIII Augusta*, and the *IV Flavia* raised by Vespasian. A negative example served to emphasize that the importance of such links went beyond that of honorific titles and became part of the system ensuring soldiers’ fighting qualities. As a direct result of losing battles in Spain in 19 BCE, a legion led by Agrippa was punished in various ways, including being deprived of its title ‘Augustan’. Other names reflected a ruler’s favoured divinity, exemplified by Augustus’ *Legio XV Apollinaris* and Domitian’s *I Flavia Minerva*. This practice was still in operation

³⁰⁰ **Victory titles:** Peachin p. 53-54. **Maximinus Thrax:** Peachin p. 58. **Trajan Decius:** *ibid* p. 68. **Aurelian:** *ibid* p. 91. **Invictus:** Brunt (1990) p 478. **Macrinus:** Cassius Dio 78. 27. 3. **Aurelian:** SHA *Aurel.* 30. 5.

during the Tetrarchy, Diocletian's Jupiter being represented by the new *I* and *II Jovia*, and Maximian's Hercules as the *II*, *III* and *IV Herculia*. Both emperor and legion could share the positive aura of some names, for example the *II Traiana fortis* ('strong') and Hadrian's *XXX Ulpia victrix* ('victorious'). A more specifically political message was contained in the designations of the *VII* and *XI Claudia pia fidelis* ('Claudian loyal and faithful'). These forces were so renamed after their refusal to support Scribonianus' revolt in 42 CE. Unusually Claudius had this confirmed by a vote in the senate. In line with his general analysis, Campbell suggests that in doing so Claudius was seeking to placate a senate that might have taken exception to so close an association between emperor and army. However, it appears equally plausible that he wished to demonstrate just such an association and to implicate the senate in flattering the troops. The reflection of political loyalty in legionary names was perhaps understandably highlighted during the civil wars of 68-69 CE. The *VII Galbiana* was raised in Spain while the *I Macriana Liberatrix* ('Macer's Liberating') was formed in Africa. It would seem natural that these names did not long outlive their sponsors' actual or attempted Imperial careers. Although it is interesting that Tacitus' reference to the *VII Galbiana* was in the context of events in Pannonia several months after Galba's death, perhaps the deliberate allusion helped to fill out the author's theme of general confusion, and of the seemingly irrational loyalties and disloyalties of the legions.³⁰¹

That the eponymous naming of legions could be seen as going too far was illustrated in Cassius Dio's account of Commodus. Among other excesses of personal glorification desired by that emperor was listed his wish to rename all the legions *Commodiana*. Caracalla actually achieved this distinction. Inscriptions indicate twenty-two legions bearing a title, *Antoniniana*, and thus related to his contemporary official name. Third century and later emperors maintained this pattern. For example, during that period, inscriptions record the *I Minervia Antoniniana*, *I Minervia Severiana Alexandriana* and *I Minervia Gordiana*. Modern authors have also interpreted these developments as excesses and the inflation of titles and honours. However, such exaggeration, although real, may have demonstrated the emperor's increasingly explicit reliance on the army. Linking this idea with the historical importance of *imperium* as representing more

³⁰¹ **Agrippa's legion:** Cass. Dio 54. 11. **Legionary names in general:** Webster, G. p. 103-105; OCD3 p. 839-842. **Tetrarchy:** Williams, S. p. 97. **Claudius:** Suet. *Claud.* 13; Campbell (1984) p. 90. **Civil war:** Tac. *Hist.* 2. 86, 97; *ibid* 1. 2.

generalised authority, Severus Alexander was described as demonstrating his *civilitas* by eschewing the use of all honorary titles except that of *Imperator*. Illustrating the deep-seated historical roots of the relationship between command of the soldiers and political power, three hundred years earlier Pompey was also said to have taken care to retain that title when laying down all others on his return from the east in 63 BCE.³⁰²

Adlocutio

In ancient historiography, speeches tended to take one of three forms: a leader's address to an assembly; an envoy's appearance before such a body in another country; and a general's amidst his troops. It is the last of these that is relevant to the present theme. Homer included a number of set-piece occasions in which the Achaean troops met in assembly to hear their leaders (and even, in the case of Thersites, an ordinary soldier) discuss important matters. The significance of these occasions appeared to be underlined by juxtaposition when Patroclus was referred to as passing a spot '...where the assembly ground and place of justice were, and gods' altars'. Xenophon gave detailed accounts of speeches to assemblies of troops and of the resulting votes to establish a chosen course of action. Absent in Herodotus, the speech directly before a battle may have been a literary genre invented by Thucydides. Although the debate about their authenticity has champions on both sides, Woodman is convincing in his contention that the ancient author's own claims on this matter were severely limited.³⁰³

One of the more important points of direct contact between a Roman emperor and soldiers would have been the situation in which he addressed assembled troops. In our sources these included formal occasions, such as succession acclamations and inspections, and presumably less planned events, for example battlefield speeches. The substantial pictorial record provides possible evidence for their being relatively frequent and convincing evidence of their ideological importance. The scene and legend appeared first on a coin of Gaius, although Augustus had been depicted in an 'address' pose without an audience or appropriate legend. Coins of other emperors are illustrated. They show a presumably stylised setting, although Plutarch provided

³⁰² **Commodus:** Cass. Dio 73. 15. 2. **Third Century 'inflation':** Campbell (1984) p. 92-93; Lendon (1997) p. 263; Gilliam p. 357. **Severus Alexander:** SHA *Alex. Sev.* 4. 1-3. **Pompey:** Vell. Pat. 2. 40. 3.

³⁰³ **Types of speech:** Polyb. 12. 25a. 3; Hansen p. 161. **Assemblies:** *Il.* 2. 90ff, 9. 15ff. **Thersites:** 2. 226ff. **Patroclus:** 11. 806-807. **Xenophon:** *An.* 3. 2, 5. 6; Hansen p. 166; Hammond p. 249-250. **Battle speeches:** Hansen p. 172; Woodman p. 11.

evidence for the common sense use of an elevated platform. Scenes of *adlocutio* were placed on the Column of Trajan, the Arch of Constantine and on the early fourth century Arch of Galerius (**Plate 24 i-iii**).³⁰⁴

Julius Caesar's accounts of his own exploits gave an indication of the frequency and range of a leader's oral contacts with the mass of his troops or at least of the impression of such communications that a commander wished to convey. Before the climactic Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BCE, he portrayed himself as '...giving the usual address to the troops' as he deployed them on the battlefield. This particular speech had a high political content, justifying the actions he had taken. Even so, Caesar claimed that on its conclusion his soldiers were 'afire with enthusiasm'. In fact the general quoted a verbal response from a particularly enthusiastic legionary. He recorded that elsewhere on the field he gave more straightforward tactical instructions and exhortations. In the account of his earlier conquest of Gaul, Caesar provided insight into the place of a battlefield address amongst the other tasks of a general. During a campaign against the Nervii in 57 BCE the army was caught off guard by a sudden attack. Writing as usual in the third person, he recalled that:

'Caesar had to do everything at once – hoist the flag which was the signal for running to arms, recall the men from their work on the camp, fetch back those who had gone far afield in search of material for the rampart, form the battle line, address the men, and sound the trumpet signal for going into action. Much of this could not be done in the short time left available by the enemy's swift onset.'

The account goes on to state that of these pressing tasks, one of things for which Caesar found time was a short address to the assembling tenth legion.³⁰⁵

At the other end of the spectrum from Caesar's hurried pre-battle speech to the tenth legion were the occasions for *adlocutio* provided by an emperor's planned inspections of military units. No emperor was more assiduous in this activity than Hadrian. Prior to his final return to Rome in 134 CE, all but six of the preceding seventeen years of his reign had been spent outside Italy. A whole series of coins recorded speeches to legions in various provinces (**Plate 24 iv**) and the texts of some of these were preserved in

³⁰⁴ **Platform:** Plut. *Mor.* 41C.

³⁰⁵ **Legionary:** *B. Civ.* 3. 90-91. **Tactics:** *B. Civ.* 3. 89. **Pre-battle tasks:** *B. Gall.* 2. 20-21.



(i) Trajan's Column



(ii) Arch of Constantine



(iii) Arch of Galerius

(iv) Hadrian
BMC 1672f



inscriptions. The most detailed examples come from Africa. Dated to 128 CE these were addressed to legionary chief centurions and directly to the troops. Their content confirmed the Emperor's wish to be associated with positive comments about the soldiers' drill, manoeuvres and building activity. Hadrian appeared to go out of his way to share the ordinary soldier's perspective. He demonstrated an understanding of the complexity of particular drills and the hard work involved in a number of manual tasks. Emphasising his adoption of the common soldier's viewpoint, the Emperor included specific praise of their officers. For example to one cavalry cohort he stated that, 'Cornelianus too, your prefect, has handled his duties satisfactorily', while to another his recorded declaration ran as follows:

'The remarkable care taken by my legate Catullinus, distinguished man, is obvious from the fact that he has men like you under his command'.³⁰⁶

That speeches to the troops may have been relatively frequent was suggested by Suetonius' account of Augustus' attempt to control the language used by his family members in addressing soldiers (see page 247). Of the emperors reigning between 68 and 235 CE, Campbell could find only three without an attested *adlocutio*. Even these absences he put down to gaps in the record. Nevertheless, Campbell tended to play down any specifically political significance in these speeches, perhaps confirming his generally limited view of soldiers' relevance in that respect. Rather grudgingly he conceded that it was important for an emperor to demonstrate an interest in his troops and that the *adlocutio* provided an opportunity to achieve this with a measure of useful display. Campbell's approach created difficulties for him in assessing the real importance of this aspect of the relationship between soldiers and emperor. He concluded his review of the subject by leaving the impression that direct contacts between emperor and soldiers were an irksome and ultimately defensive duty for any ruler hoping to retain his power, while for

'...simple men the break in the humdrum tedium of the normal duties of a soldier was no doubt welcome'.

Campbell had included the evidence of Titus' summary execution of Aulus Caecina, described by Suetonius as

³⁰⁶ **Hadrian's inspections:** Lewis and Reinhold 2. 148; Campbell (1994) 17; Cass. Dio 69. 9. 1-5; Birley (1997) p. 210-213.

‘...a matter of urgency, since a speech had been found in the man’s writing which was to be delivered to a gathering of the soldiers.’

Although the treasonous aspect of Caecina’s intention was noted, nothing was made of the implied political role of troops as forming a constituency to be won over.³⁰⁷

Taking a broader view, there is in fact useful scope here to see soldiers gathered in an audience as demonstrating a degree of political awareness and active involvement. Through the semi-formal mechanism of the *contio* the Roman populace had long been able to gather, as often as not to be addressed by a politician looking for a platform or to consider legislative and judicial matters without determining any binding conclusion. However, such meetings also facilitated the formulation and expression of their collective views. Soldiers in camp came together in a similar way, for instance to receive campaign awards or to present their commander with an imperial salutation. Even at a time of high excitement and doubtful discipline Appian described the scene as Julius Caesar’s mutinous soldiers

‘...ran together tumultuously without arms, and, as was their custom, saluted their commander who had suddenly appeared among them.’

In the context of the principate the political meanings of these rewards and acclamations became more specific. Characteristics of the army of that period, a gradually widening recruitment base, and increasing pay and professionalisation, undoubtedly brought about a loosening of the formal political ties between soldiers and the Roman people. However, these did not disappear completely and could re-emerge at times of particular stress, for example during the civil wars of 68-69 CE. Tacitus, certainly no apologist for the political sensitivities of massed soldiery, portrayed the legions in Upper and Lower Germany as deferring their oaths of allegiance to a new emperor to the decisions of the ‘senate and people of Rome’. Bearing in mind the author’s antipathy towards the involvement of the army in politics, the fact that he made these references in a sarcastic tone is perhaps less important than that he recorded them at all. In the hasty comings and goings that brought Claudius to power, *contiones* of the troops in Rome operated alongside meetings of the senate and people. Josephus’ account showed the military garrison to be playing an overtly political role. Suetonius concurred in the number and order of meetings. The sequence of these meetings is

³⁰⁷ **Frequency and importance of speeches:** Campbell (1984) p. 69-71, 87-88; Suet. *Tit.* 6.

significant for the interpretation of the accession donative and the army's role in politics. Having first acclaimed Claudius as emperor on the Palatine, subsequent meetings saw the swearing of the loyal oath and the promise of a donative. Debate and decision about what to do preceded formal confirmation, which in turn was followed by financial gain. From this it is possible to interpret the donative as 'an expected reward for empowerment' rather than a bribe or gesture of gratitude. In fact the expectation has been defined as 'part of the soldier's evolving political culture'. It is clear that Tacitus had these developments in mind when writing about Tiberius' accession. There is no mistaking the deliberate sourness in his references to what he saw as subversion of the traditional formula of *senatus populusque* as he rendered it as *senatus milesque et populus*. Alongside the clear disapproval there was perhaps recognition of the emergence in the principate of a genuinely political aspect to the army's behaviour. It is undoubtedly the case that other references to this tripartite division of the *res publica* appeared to be more matter-of-fact than critical. When circumstances dictated that the Roman senate could not be in attendance, the remaining elements of the trinity could certainly form an acceptable representation of the state. Pescennius Niger was described as addressing a joint meeting of soldiers and civilians at Antioch during the initial stages of the civil war of 193 CE. His rival, Septimius Severus, lacking such an urban setting, made do with the soldiers alone as he proclaimed his candidature. Most likely writing only a few decades after Tacitus, Appian had demonstrated a relaxed attitude to what must then have been clearly demarcated political groups. He recorded four divisions at the funeral of Sulla in 79 BCE, senate, equites, soldiers and plebeians, honouring the dead man apparently in that order of precedence.³⁰⁸

In its characteristically confused fashion, the SHA had M. Claudius Tacitus succeed Aurelian at the instigation of the senate alone. The elderly senator was reported to have argued against his own appointment, principally because of his lack of military

³⁰⁸ **Contiones:** Lintott (1999) p. 42-43; Rowe, G. p. 155-157; App. *B. Civ.* 2. 93. **Soldiers and SPQR:** *Hist.* 1. 12, 55; Rowe, G. p. 158-160. **Claudius:** Joseph. *AJ* 204-214; Suetonius 10. 4; Rowe, G. p. 161, 169-172. **Tacitus:** *Ann.* 1. 7. 2; Rowe, G. p. 161; Syme (1958b) p. 412; Griffin (1991) p. 40. **Other tripartite divisions:** Cass. Dio 56. 42. 1; a good king, said Dio Chrysostom, was '...fond of his companions, fellow-citizens and soldiers in like measure' (1. 28); the author of the SHA warned of the dangers looming for emperors '...who do not win the love of the senate, the people and the soldiers...' (*Heliogab.* 17. 7). **Niger and Severus:** Herodian 2. 8. 1-6; 2. 10. 1-9. **Sulla's funeral:** App. *B. Civ.* 1. 106.

prowess. However, when he eventually agreed to become emperor, he was presented to the Roman people on the *Campus Martius*, an area traditionally associated with the army, and proclaimed as the choice of the senate 'at the request of all the armies'. Tacitus was then described as addressing the troops and, using *commilitones* language, to have portrayed himself as their choice. In relation to the earlier discussion of the donative, it is noteworthy that it was only after the completion of these meetings that the 'customary' payments were made to the soldiers. With greater clarity, the political role of soldiers, and indeed the desirability of militarily qualified emperor, were made clear in the author of the SHA's hymn to the suitability of Probus for the role:

'So great, moreover, was Probus in matters of war that the senate desired him, the soldiers elected him, and the Roman people itself demanded him by acclamations'.³⁰⁹

The emperor as proprietor of the Roman military

The evidence cited so far has established that the emperor had a close personal relationship with the army. This relationship can be further clarified by reference to its exclusivity. It is true that in the early second century CE, Appian could put into the mouth of Cassius a speech specifically refuting the idea that soldiers' first loyalty was to their commander. However, this was delivered during manoeuvres prior to the climactic battle at Philippi in 42 BCE. Faced with the prospect of fighting the avenging forces of Antony and Octavian, Cassius and the other assassins of Julius Caesar were only too aware that the best of their own troops had been under Caesar's personal command. Cassius emphasised to the assembled soldiers that they '...were not his...but our country's' and that they were fighting '...only for the freedom of the senate and people of Rome'. Of course, this rallying cry represented the claims of Cassius and his co-assassins, and to an extent must be seen as rhetorical, concealing their underlying motives in upholding the oligarchic power of an elite threatened by shifts towards autocratic authority. With regard to the soldiers of the legions, Appian appeared, at least initially, to conclude that the loyalty of Caesar's former troops was assured by cash handouts and promises. The analysis of modern commentators, such as Syme, has generally left it at that. However, Appian himself went on to record that the generals of the opposing sides both offered special bonus payments and made promises of future

³⁰⁹ **Claudius Tacitus:** SHA *Tac.* 4. 1-9. 1; OCD3 p. 284. **Probus:** SHA *Tac.* 14. 3.

rewards. Further, he added that suspicions about the loyalty of Caesar's former soldiers remained and, at the end of his account of the battle, the historian felt the need to explain why those soldiers had in fact stood unwaveringly against Antony and Octavian, respectively Caesar's close colleague and adopted son. Appian's straightforward and perhaps surprising conclusion was that they had fought not for '...their own interest, but the cause of democracy'. Although the author then appeared to disparage the general idea of such motivation, he did so no more in relation to the soldiers than to their leaders, Brutus and Cassius. What, if anything, can be concluded from this consideration of soldiers' behaviour at Philippi? Two relevant things seem to emerge about Appian's outlook. Firstly, from his likely Trajanic/Hadrianic perspective, he clearly expected soldiers to be personally loyal to their commanders; secondly, he was not so easily persuaded as some modern historians that troops could be motivated solely by short-term financial incentives.³¹⁰

There can be no doubt that, in the most general way, the state's use of military force was focused on the emperor; part of the treason law covered anyone who assembled an army 'without the command of the emperor.' At the most detailed level we have evidence for the emperor's response to the suggested deployment of troops for non-military tasks away from their units. This was recorded in the correspondence of Pliny the Younger. Several sets of letters indicated a basic policy on Trajan's part, described by the Emperor himself as a 'general rule', that '...as few soldiers as possible should be called away from active service'. This guidance should be seen as being relevant in a number of contexts. Although not explicitly referring to soldiers, two of Pliny's own requests, for a land surveyor and an architect, were met by the Emperor's reluctance to release personnel (almost certainly military) for provincial civilian tasks.³¹¹

It is interesting, if tantalising, to compare the information provided by Pliny with that from other, potentially more direct sources. A feature of the Imperial Roman army was the enormous amount of record keeping that attended its activities. Unfortunately, little of this has survived. For example, it has been calculated that for the period between Augustus and Diocletian there could have been as many as 225 million pay records for

³¹⁰ **Cassius' speech:** App. *B Civ.* 4. 98. **Financial rewards:** *ibid.* 4. 118, 121; Syme (1939) p. 204.

Suspensions and Appian's analysis: *B Civ.* 4. 124, 133.

³¹¹ **Treason:** Dig. 48. 4. 3. **Troop deployment:** *Ep.* 10. 17B and 18, 39 and 40, 19 and 20, 27 and 28.

individual soldiers; of these only a handful survive in a useful state of preservation. Documents that do exist come in a number of forms, including papyri and ostraka from Egypt, Dura-Europus on the Euphrates and North Africa. The Egyptian material covers a large number of locations and dates, while that from Syria relates to a third century cohort of archers. The North African documents provide elements similar to a resource unique to Britain, the Vindolanda tablets. Most of these derive from the period 92-103 CE, thus slightly predating Pliny's Trajanic material. For the present purpose, that of considering the ideological implications of evidence for the control of troop deployments, one important tablet provides exceptional detail about a single unit. This document indicated the condition and activities of a cohort of Tungrian auxiliaries, probably dating from 92-97 CE. Relevant to the Pliny/Trajan correspondence, the tablet recorded that one detachment was in London on guard duty with the governor of Britain and that specific numbers of others were elsewhere than at Vindolanda. Besides a substantial deployment at nearby '*Coria*' (presumably Corbridge), the legibility of these locations has defeated decipherment. The lack of information about where these detachments were and about the nature of their tasks makes interpretation difficult. Nevertheless it must unlikely that the Tungrians' variety of deployments was startlingly unusual, at least for a frontier unit. Nothing about the tablet indicated that it was anything but a routine record. It is therefore safe to assume that neither Trajan nor any other emperor could possibly have involved himself in such small scale troop deployments. While it is of interest that there must have been some plausibility in the suggestion that Severus Alexander had detailed knowledge of such matters, the claim must be exaggerated. However, the customary nature of Roman military records provides an indication of the deep-seated relationship between an emperor and his soldiers. Papyri recording the 'morning reports' of the Cohort 20 Palmyrenorum at Dura Europus are prefaced with the formula, 'There are standing watch at the standards of our lord the Emperor...' (in this case one of the Gordians between 239 and 241 CE). Similar formulae connected the person of the emperor with recruitment of soldiers and with their discharge at the end of service. But in terms of the bases of authority and the realities of political power, how significant were such connections? It might be argued that the present British monarch has comparable links with the contemporary armed forces and that these connections are merely ceremonial. While this is undoubtedly true, such ceremonies and links are not synthetic; rather they are the vestigial remains of once real relationships and powers. Illustrative episodes in British history include the

following: Harold II's defence of his kingdom in 1065-66 centred on his personal ability to mobilise and lead varying forces in different parts of the country; Charles I's attempts, beginning in 1634, to raise funds for the navy without the intervention of Parliament were a significant element in the disputes leading to the Civil War; and as late as 1743 at Dettingen, a King of England, George II, led his troops into battle. In the light of such evidence, we need not doubt the reality of a Roman emperor's personal connection with his troops.³¹²

The obvious practical limitations of the emperor's competence exemplified from Vindolanda may serve to highlight an important aspect of the issue discussed in Pliny's letters. He recorded Trajan's response to the request of a prefect, transmitted by Pliny, for a larger military escort. In turning down the application, the Emperor added a revealing comment about the officer's possible motives for wanting more soldiers:

‘It is important to distinguish between the needs of a situation and the likelihood of his wishing to extend his privileges because of it’

The Emperor's proprietorial concern for the correct use of his soldiers was clear. His responses revealed an unambiguous view about the ideal use of soldiers and a menacing grasp of the importance to his own status of his complete control over them. The significance of the relationship was well illustrated by Josephus' elaborate account of the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Having secured the city, Titus' first thought was to

‘...congratulate the whole army on its achievements and bestow suitable rewards on those whose services were outstanding’.

Josephus recorded that the young Caesar (whose position at this stage was as close to being that of an emperor as is required for the present argument) was at pains to acknowledge and reward personally the outstanding acts of individuals:

‘Calling them by name he praised them as they came forward, as delighted as a man could be over his own exploits’

³¹² **Documentation:** Bowman (1994) p. 34ff; writing at some time between the late fourth and mid fifth century CE Vegetius provided detail (for example, *Mil.* 2. 19) of the documentation produced in the ‘ancient legion’. He is likely to have used sources dating back to Cato the Censor's *De re militare*; Milner p. xxxvii. **Pay records:** Fink p. 242. **Tungrians (Tab. Vindol. 1154):** Bowman (1994) p. 22, 104-5. **Severus Alexander:** SHA *Alex. Sev.* 21. 6-8. **Formulae:** Fink 50 (p. 196); Gilliam p. 113, 163. **British monarchy:** Stenton p. 586-593; Davies p. 84-85; Williams, B. p. 242.

It is particularly telling that Josephus went on to state that it was only at the conclusion of this ceremony, focussed directly on the soldiers, that Titus ‘...then turned his attention to sacrifices in honour of his victory’.³¹³

The emperors’ jealous guardianship of their soldiers can be illustrated from numerous further examples. In the context of specifying the titles by which Tiberius cared to be designated, Cassius Dio had the Emperor identify himself with the military; ‘I am master (*dominus*) of the slaves, *imperator* of the soldiers, and chief (*princeps*) of all the rest’. The fact that Cassius Dio demonstrated confusion over the usages of *princeps*, employing the Greek word relating to *princeps senatus*, does not seriously detract from the point. During campaigns in Germany in 47 CE Corbulo was recalled by Claudius; the Emperor’s reason, stated in general terms as a fear that the general was becoming too powerful, was characterised by Cassius Dio as personal jealousy. Later, indeed, Corbulo was to be forced into suicide by Nero because of similar emotions of fear and jealousy. Tacitus portrayed Domitian’s feelings towards Agricola in a similar light, that general surviving only through judicious retirement. These specific instances of an emperor’s close relationship with his soldiers support Campbell’s general statement that:

‘The emperor’s control of military affairs was limited only in so far as he chose voluntarily to consult more widely’³¹⁴

The emperor honours his soldiers

Emperors could display the utmost sensitivity about actions that had the potential to influence the political loyalty of their soldiers. Instances already discussed include Augustus’ strictures on the use of *commilitones* language and Trajan’s advice to Pliny about the ulterior motives of army commanders. An area with which emperors took particular care was the control of sources from which soldiers could expect to receive rewards and honours. The experiences of the first century BCE civil wars had amply demonstrated the destabilising effects of a situation in which armies looked solely to their immediate generals for the fulfilment of pecuniary and other aspirations. A clear aim of Augustus’ military reforms had been to make himself the only focus for such

³¹³ **Trajan and the prefect:** Plin. *Ep.* 21 and 22. **Titus:** Joseph. *BJ* 7. 10-16.

³¹⁴ **Tiberius:** Cass. Dio 57. 8. 2; OCD3 p. 1247. **Claudius:** Cass. Dio 60. 30. 4-5. **Nero:** Cass. Dio 63. 17. **6. Domitian:** Tac. *Agr.* 39-42. **General statement:** Campbell (2002b) p. 5.

ambitions. His measures included the establishment of a central *aerarium militare* to ensure regular pay. Initially this was funded from his own resources and later from hypothecated taxation. In general, Augustus sought to establish a professional standing army under the personal control of the *princeps*, reducing to a minimum any *clientela* relationship between soldiers and their commanders. His example was followed by Tiberius when it was suggested by Junius Gallio that veteran soldiers should receive special privileges with regard to theatre seating. In an incident included by Cassius Dio and Tacitus, the latter had the Emperor round on Gallio,

‘...asking him...what his business was with soldiers who should properly receive neither words nor rewards except from their Commander.’

The point was elaborated in a manner that made Tacitus’ and/or Tiberius’ views on the matter crystal clear. Besides the intrinsic error of devising an arrangement at odds with those proposed by Augustus, the accusation levelled at Gallio was that he

‘...sought discord and mutiny in order to propel raw minds, under the pretext of an honour, to corrupt the conventions of the soldiery’

The importance of the principle at stake was emphasised by the relative triviality of Gallio’s suggestion, most likely motivated as it was by sycophancy rather than military ambition. Cassius Dio expressed the underlying issue plainly and succinctly, stating that Gallio had been banished,

‘...the specific charge being that he was apparently trying to induce the guards to be loyal to the state (*koinon*) rather than to the emperor’.

In the matter of honours, the personal nature of the relationship between an emperor and his soldiers was clearly expressed by Velleius Paterculus. He reported the joy of troops at being reunited with Tiberius, the soldiers being unable

‘...to restrain such cries as...“I received my decoration from you in Vindelicia! And mine in Pannonia! And I in Germany!”’.

It is worth adding that the author’s army experience enhances his reliability on such a topic, particularly because he chose to precede this anecdote with detail of that career, ‘It was at this time that I became a soldier in the camp of Tiberius Caesar’.³¹⁵

³¹⁵ **Augustus:** Keppie p. 1005-1016. **Tiberius:** Tac. *Ann.* 6. 3. 1-3; Cass. Dio 58. 18. 3-4; Lendon (1997) p. 260-261. **Velleius Paterculus:** 2. 104. 3-4.

The social status of soldiers

This topic is important here because it provides a necessary perspective on detail considered in the earlier sections. There it was noted that Roman emperors, alongside other ancient rulers, projected positive images of themselves as sharing in the physical labours and hardships of soldiers. Emperors addressed their troops in strikingly familiar forms, bestowed personal honours upon them and even shared their names with the legions. In a society characterised by markedly rigid hierarchies of status and wealth, such behaviour needs explanation. Manual labour, even in pursuit of an art or skilled craft, could be considered vulgar at best, contrary to the behaviour of an ethically good man at worst. Its inescapable association with the activities of slaves must be relevant here. Personal communication with those considered to be of inferior social standing could be seen as problematic. Suetonius described a relevant incident said to have taken place during Tiberius' retirement on Rhodes. In a passage emphasising the lack of social pretension adopted by the future emperor at this time, the biographer described how Tiberius would occasionally stroll through the town 'exchanging greetings with the ordinary Greeks'. On one occasion his expressed intention to visit individuals who were unwell was misinterpreted by his attendants. They gathered together all the local sick, arranging them for inspection. Suetonius recorded that Tiberius was for some time at a loss as to what to do,

'...eventually going round each individual, apologising for what had happened even to the humblest and most insignificant.'

It is probable that the intended interpretation of Tiberius' response was positive, as demonstrating his readiness to admit a mistake in embarrassing circumstances. However, the spirit of Suetonius' story clearly indicated the awkwardness of the situation and its inclusion must be intended to demonstrate that this aspect of Tiberius' behaviour was unexpected in usual social relationships. Far more typical must have been manifestations of the editorial sentiment expressed by Plutarch that, 'The multitude can have no greater honour shown to them than not to be despised.' Even when social acknowledgement was expected, it could be unmistakably graded. For example, someone could be employed to walk beside a Roman of superior social status and to greet, on their behalf, individuals of lower status with whom direct communication was considered demeaning. It is against this background that we must consider the implications of emperors' behaviour towards their soldiers, viewed in relation to assessments of the social background of the troops. A postscript to the

incident of Tiberius and the sick population of Rhodes is indicative. Admittedly in what amounted to a panegyric context, Tiberius was specifically praised for the personal care he took over sick and injured soldiers.³¹⁶

That soldiers' general social status was indistinguishable from that of the lower elements of urban plebeians or rural labourers finds support from a reading of our elite ancient sources. Tacitus habitually equated the behaviour of troops with that of the undisciplined urban masses. Often this was in the context of mutiny or some other breakdown in discipline. However, as it suited his editorial intentions, he slid beyond such disordered situations to characterise as 'mob' behaviour the involvement of soldiers in the turbulent politics of disputes about the Imperial throne. In relation to the general quality of soldiers, Tacitus had Tiberius complain in 23 CE that voluntary recruitment was attracting 'only the impoverished and vagrants'. Plutarch was clearly disgusted that Eumenes' Macedonian soldiers 'acted like a capricious mob'. Cassius Dio had Maecenas differentiate among the citizens those who would be suitable as soldiers and those who might be farmers, sailors or follow other productive pursuits. In the same speech Maecenas equated troops from the ranks with '...men who have carried loads of firewood and charcoal'. This broadly negative view of soldiers' background and status has been upheld by modern scholars, such as Campbell. He emphasised an interpretation of the evidence that tends to debase soldiers' motives, origins and education. On this basis he felt able to conclude that:

'In general, although emperors identified themselves closely with the army, they remained aloof from and even contemptuous of the ordinary soldiers'.

Beyond the behaviour of probably undisputed exceptions to this generalisation, such as Trajan and Hadrian, the totality of evidence is susceptible to alternative interpretations that better fit the close link between an emperor and his soldiers.³¹⁷

The starting point for a reconsideration of this issue must be the myth/historical origins of the Roman military and the reverence in which these were held in later periods.

³¹⁶ **Manual labour:** Cic. *Off.* 1. 150 and 2. 88-89; Plut. *Per.* 1. 5; Lendon (1997) p. 240; Shelton p. 125-126. **Communication:** Gell. 7. 11. 1; Dio Chrys. 66. 3; Suet. *Tib.* 11; Plut. *Nic.* 2. 4; *Cat. Min.* 8. 2.

Soldiers: Vell. Pat. 2. 114. 1-2.

³¹⁷ **Soldiers as mob:** Tac. *Hist.* 2. 29, 44, 93, 3. 31; Carrié p. 105. **Soldiers in politics:** *ibid.* 2. 37.

Tiberius: Tac. *Ann.* 4. 4. 2; Plut. *Eum.* 15. 3; Cass. Dio: 52. 25, 27; Campbell (2002a) p. 13-14, 32ff.

Detail of the privileged personal status ascribed to soldiers in the early Republic was considered in Part One. Here it suffices to restate that the tradition indicated citizenship to be comprised of an interlinked series of privileges and responsibilities founded on political, religious and military factors. The established organisation of the army was based on a citizen's ability to finance his own equipment; the greater his resources, the more prominent and dangerous his role in battle. The image of fighting for the Republic as a high status activity was maintained. This is demonstrable by the manner in which later writers reported deviations from the norm. The extraordinary circumstances following the crushing defeat by Hannibal at Cannae in 216 BCE necessitated what Livy referred to as an 'unprecedented form of recruitment', namely the admission of slaves into the ranks. Valerius Maximus commented that the City had previously '...disdained to have as soldiers even free men without property'. Undoubtedly the property qualification for the legions was gradually eroded in response to the increasing demands of Rome's overseas expansion. At the start of the first century BCE a watershed, seen as a sinister precursor of the civil wars, was reached when Gaius Marius recruited citizens unable to meet any property requirement (see pages 50-51). This reorganisation of Roman forces into a professional standing army of citizen volunteers was further systematised by Augustus after his victory at Actium in 31 BCE. If the military situation appeared to be especially threatening, even Augustus could take measures that broke from this established pattern. After the loss of Varus' legions in 9 CE, the census classification of Roman citizens was used, not to allocate military duties to those individuals, but to determine their liability to produce freedmen to fill the gaps in the army. Perhaps it was uncertainty about social status in this fluid and evolving situation that could cause problems even for the normally sure footed Octavian. At the theatre in 41 BCE he was said to have ordered the removal of a soldier who had occupied a seat reserved for senators and equites. In slightly differing accounts, our sources indicated that the soldier's colleagues reacted badly to a suspicion that he had been imprisoned or killed. Only the reappearance of the unharmed soldier saved Octavian from physical attack. The evidence remains strong that concern about recruitment continued in these new circumstances.³¹⁸

³¹⁸ **Republican soldiers:** Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7. 59. 2.8. **Slaves:** Livy 22. 57; Val. Max. 7. 6. 1a. **Erosion of property qualification:** OCD3 p. 172; Sall. *Iug.* 86. 2-3. **Augustus:** Cass. Dio 55. 23-24; Suet. *Aug.* 49. **Post-Varus:** Cass. Dio 55. 31; Vell. Pat. 2. 111. **Soldier in the theatre:** Suet. *Aug.* 14; App. *B Civ.* 5. 15.

The care taken to prevent the enlistment of any but the freeborn can certainly be demonstrated. A papyrus from 92 CE recorded the oaths required of both a recruit and his guarantors that he was freeborn and a Roman citizen. The fact that sponsors were necessary at all, added to the evidence of a papyrus discharge certificate, dated to 52 CE, noting the release from service of a weaver, suggests that these soldiers were not of the lowest status. An exchange of letters between Pliny and Trajan recorded that the Emperor took very seriously the discovery of two slaves who had enlisted in the eastern legions. The matter was viewed as a potential capital offence for the men involved and one which would have serious consequences for anyone else implicated. Second century CE injunctions against the drafting of those not deemed to be suitable for the army can be found in the law digests. As to the general status of recruits, Tiberius' complaint about the quality of volunteers was made in the context of his attempt to justify a desired tour of the provinces. One of the 'pretexts' he employed was the need to levy troops outside Italy, thus indicating the peninsula to be the origin of the poor quality soldiers, but weakening the possible objective truth of his recorded opinion. It is clear that the proportion of Italian troops in the legions fell during the first century CE, reaching perhaps twenty percent by the end of the century and dwindling to zero under Hadrian. However, as Tiberius' view may indicate, this does not necessarily suggest a fall in the over-all social background of recruits. The impression that such a decline may have taken place as recruitment widened from its Italian base may be connected to Augustus' formation of the Praetorian Guard in 27 BCE. They were drawn from Italy and being the troops closest to the person of the emperor it was not surprising that their pay and conditions were superior to those of other legionaries. Nevertheless, focussing on the legions as a whole, it has been argued that the status origins of soldiers increased during the first two centuries of the CE. The legions involved in the civil wars of 68-70 CE have been credited with a consciousness of their own political and economic place in society, and with a wish enhance both; 'legionaries were scarcely proletarians'. Support for such an assessment comes from the jurists. Arrius Menander, possibly *a libellis* under Caracalla, noted that in the tradition the evasion of military responsibility had been a more serious crime than ineligible recruitment. The fate of C. Vettienus, chained 'in perpetuity' because he cut off fingers from his left hand in order to avoid fighting in the Social war, provided a potent symbol of the state's response to evasion. However, Menander went on to say that such avoidance was no longer such a problem because:

‘With the changed conditions of military service...for the most part the numbers are made up with volunteer soldiers’

This would not seem to be describing an activity of declining status, but rather one in which the intrinsic attractions were perceived as being enhanced. In this respect it is relevant to add that, whatever the status of ordinary legionaries might be at any particular moment, there is no doubting that in all periods soldiers had greater access to upward social mobility than most sections of Roman society.³¹⁹

Evidence concerning the educational attainments of Roman soldiers is limited and therefore should not be over interpreted. For example, Egyptian papyri provide some examples of a useful level of literacy among soldiers. In a document of 179 CE concerning the hay ration of a cavalry unit, about ten percent of the notional strength of five hundred troops demonstrated the ability to write up to six lines of Greek. Others could sign their names. Against this, there are indications that soldiers’ ignorance had to be accommodated. The privileges granted to troops in the making of wills were explained by the jurists relation to soldiers’ inability to carry out proper legal procedures. Although some have suggested that soldiers may have been above the average, generalisations are hard to make from such instances and tell us little about levels of literacy in the military in relation to the population as a whole. Nevertheless, the origin and substance of some of the information that is available are highly suggestive. The Vindolanda tablets provide examples of written material that concern numerous aspects of the official and unofficial activity of a legionary base. Despite evidence indicating the presence of professional scribes, the documents show the hands of hundreds of individuals. Two justifiably broad conclusions have been drawn from Vindolanda about the role of literacy in the Roman legions. The first relates to the location of the site on the northern edge of the Empire within a few decades of the invasion of Britain. The existence of an undeniably literate military community in such circumstances suggests that the use of reading and writing throughout Roman forces would have been of at least a similar level. The second conclusion informs the estimate that we can make of the role and importance of literacy for the military. Evidence of

³¹⁹ **Papyri:** Lewis and Reinhold 1. 144. **Trajan:** Plin. *Ep.* 10. 29-30. **Laws:** Dig. 49. 16. 2. 1-9; 16. 11. **Tiberius:** Tac. *Ann.* 4. 4. 2. **Fewer Italian troops:** Campbell (2002b) p. 26. **Praetorians:** OCD3 p. 1241. **Increasing status:** Carrié p. 107-8. **68-70 CE:** Chilver (1957) p. 31 n. 20. **Menander:** Dig. 49. 16. 4. 10; New Pauly 2 p. 29. **Vettienus:** Val. Max. 6. 3. 3c. **Social mobility:** Syme (1939) p. 352; Marcone p. 364-365.

identifiably literate individuals other than the higher officers and centurions includes at least the *principales* (specialist soldiers, such as standard bearers). Further it is clear that literacy served a vital function in the control and organisation of all ranks, effectively shaping the military occupation of the island through communication between its establishments.³²⁰

Another indicator of the social status of Roman soldiers was their place within the economy of the Empire. Although any figure can be no more than a broad estimate, it is clear that military spending was the Roman state's largest item of expenditure. It required perhaps forty percent of the Empire's disposable income in the first century CE. The task of supplying three or four hundred thousand troops stationed around the Empire between the beginnings of the first and third centuries CE fell largely on the areas in which they were based. The available statistical data allows no precise calculation of the local economic impact of this situation, although it must be the case that the over-all burden was sustainable. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that soldiers could be troublesome in their demands, and that their money, skills and organisation could give them a significant grip on the local economy. Pliny's letters to Trajan and the law digests are indicative. They record the problems of troops travelling through towns and list soldiers whose proficiency in skills such as land surveying, cart-making and charcoal-burning, made them exempt from other duties. It is inconceivable that such expertise did not impinge on the local population. In starker economic terms laws were recorded that prevented soldiers from buying land in the provinces in which they served. However, these laws appear to be considerably weakened by provisions that allowed soldiers to inherit land in those areas, to buy it in other provinces and even to retain land bought in their legion's province if no one complained prior to the purchaser's discharge date.³²¹

Estimates of the personal spending power of soldiers are bedevilled by problems; in particular those surrounding the twin uncertainties of monetary inflation in relation to

³²⁰ **Limited evidence and Egypt:** Carrié p. 126-127, 128. **Wills:** Dig. 29. 1. 1; Gai. *Inst* 2. 109. **Relative standards of literacy:** Coulston p. 91. **Vindolanda:** Bowman (1994) especially ch. 7. **Scribes:** *ibid.* p. 88, 93, 95. **Principales:** *ibid.* p. 59. **Conclusions:** *ibid.* p. 83, 96; Woolf (2000) p. 892.

³²¹ **Military expenditure:** Campbell (1994) p. 85. **Local impact:** Garnsey and Saller p. 88-90, 102-103; Roth p. 155, 241-243; Plin. *Ep.* 10. 78-79. **Exemptions:** Dig. 50. 6. 7. It must be added that the inclusion of 'makers of bronze statues of cows' within the long list of exempted occupations must cast doubt on its accuracy! **Land:** Dig. 49. 16. 9 and 13.

levels of pay, and the financial value of materials and services received by soldiers both as part of and in addition to their pay. Also, the existing evidence can seem to be sufficiently contradictory to baffle clear analysis; for example, food parcels and a variety of personal material appear to have passed in roughly equal quantities between Egyptian legionaries in Alexandria and their families in other areas. However, for the end of the fourth century the SHA may have provided evidence to support the notion that soldiers could have been sufficiently wealthy to take advantage of legal loopholes that allowed them to buy land. While the nature of the document certainly indicates the need for caution in precise interpretation, it included orders made by Pescennius Niger to the effect that soldiers were forbidden to use silver table vessels in camp or to carry into battle money-belts containing gold and silver coins. In addition to the civilian settlements that grew beside military bases throughout the Empire, the fifty or so *coloniae* set up for veterans between 14 and 117 CE must have had a major effect on their areas. Certainly some of these, such as Timgad, became large cities, while the relative power and wealth of Camulodunum seemed to be a factor in the Boudiccan revolt of 60 CE. As far as individual soldiers were concerned, it has been concluded that their security of pay, general welfare, medical provision and pension/land settlements at the end of service would appear favourable in comparison with those of many armies up to the modern age. While still under arms, their spending power has been calculated to have had a significant impact, particularly in Rome itself.³²²

During the first and second centuries CE there was a growing trend for particular legions to be stationed for long periods of time in one locality. A natural consequence of this development was that recruitment also tended to be from the same area, thus inevitably strengthening routine connections between soldiers and civilians. The potential complexity of the resultant relationships can be illustrated from the reign of Maximinus Thrax (235-238). Herodian recorded that this avaricious soldier-emperor took for himself, first the wealth of the rich and then the resources of the cities and provinces. He excused this behaviour by indicating the needs of the army. However, such double-dealing could not go unnoticed in a society in which soldier and civilian were closely linked. Thus,

³²² **Problematic data:** Burnett p. 105-121; Hassall p. 320; Bohec p. 213-218. **Egypt:** Carrié p. 123-124. **SHA:** *Pesc. Nig.* 10. 1, 10. 7; OCD3 p. 713. **Colonia:** Mann, J. C. p. 59; Tac. *Ann.* 14. 31. 3. **General welfare:** Campbell (2002b) p. 34. **Spending power:** Coulston p. 89.

‘...in the cities and the provinces, the hearts of the people were filled with rage. The soldiers too were disgusted with his activities, for their relatives and fellow citizens complained that Maximinus was acting solely for the benefit of the military’.

By the end of the third century CE there can be no doubt of the military’s central position in the economy or of the emperor’s direct concern about the matter. The preface to Diocletian’s price edict of 301 CE made it clear that the primary target of the measure was to regularise the circumstances in which the army was supplied and in which individual soldiers were able to use their spending power. The preface first contextualised the edict as being necessary to consolidate the stability made possible by efforts of the military in securing the Empire from barbarian threat. After berating the excesses of unscrupulous traders in general, it continued:

‘Who does not know that wherever the common safety requires our armies to be sent, the profiteers insolently and covertly attack the public welfare, not only in villages and towns, but on every road?’

The edict claimed that the resources of the Empire as a whole were being wasted in this way, and the evil was personalised in the problems of the individual soldier, who ‘...sometimes in a single retail sale...is stripped of his donative and pay’.³²³

The legal status of soldiers

In relation to the period between Augustus and Severus Alexander, Campbell has provided a detailed picture of the legal status and privileges of Roman soldiers. Their special advantages ranged over wills, property rights and access to the emperor. In addition, laws deriving from the early third century jurist Herennius Modestinus’ *Book of Punishments* indicated that soldiers were not liable to certain penalties that could be inflicted on civilians. These included being sent to the mines or tortured. Veterans also enjoyed exemptions from some of the worst legal impositions. At the outset of his lengthy exposition, Campbell identified and attempted to deal with a problem presented by this evidence to any analyst holding the view that soldiers generally came from the lowest echelons of society. He acknowledged the disjunction between a dismissive social assessment and the numerous legal advantages enjoyed by soldiers. Campbell offered two possible explanations; that the privileges were a pragmatic

³²³ **Legions locally based:** Campbell (2002b) p. 35. **Maximinus:** Herodian 7. 3. 3-6. **Price edict:** Lewis and Reinhold 2. 129.

response to practical difficulties attendant on a soldier's life or that their special rights stemmed from the emperor's need to maintain the personal loyalty of his soldiers. Without resolving this issue, Campbell effectively re-stated his opinion of troops as lower class by cautioning that an emperor could not go too far in privileging his soldiers for fear that they might '...aspire to the dignity and social prestige that were the prerogative of men of rank.' The jaundiced views of Cassius Dio were deployed to support this argument. An alternative analysis, taking the evidence of legal privilege more at face value, might see the soldier's position as deriving in part from a genuinely elevated status, if not in polite society, then at least in relation to the emperor and to political decision making.³²⁴

The plausibility of this more positive view is supported by evidence from outside Rome about the army's role in policy making. Shortly after his death, Alexander's plans for future campaigns were put to and rejected by the army in assembly. Antigonus' major policy proposals about campaigning against Cassander and proclaiming 'freedom' for Greece were voted for by an assembly of his soldiers before being advertised. In general, Hellenistic monarchs recognized that soldiers formed a separate legal and political group. Even mercenary regiments were granted the status of distinct *politeumata* (juridical entities), thus creating political groups parallel to those of Hellenistic population centres. In a Roman context, the right of soldiers to consider the stated plans of their leaders, and then to approve or disapprove specific actions, can be recognised. Perhaps the evidence may relate this to particularly desperate enterprises, such as that proposed by Publius Decius. In order to cover the retreat of Roman legions fighting the Samnites in 345-343 BCE, he outlined to designated units a scheme that seemed certain to end in their destruction. Decius requested that the soldiers involved should indicate their agreement or disagreement, and stated that he would abide by the majority decision. Nevertheless, when considered alongside the earlier sections of this chapter, this brief survey of the social and legal status of soldiers helps to explain the identification of emperors with their troops, and the Roman rulers' positive behaviour towards them. In part such evidence helps to fill an apparent gap identified by Campbell when he concluded:

³²⁴ **Legal position:** Campbell (1984) ch. IV-VII. **Wills:** Juv. 16. 51; Campbell (1984) p. 210ff. **Property:** *ibid.* p. 229ff. **Access:** *ibid.* p. 267f; Plin. *Ep.* 10. 106. **Punishments:** Dig. 49. 16. 3. 1; 49. 18. 1. **Lower classes/privileges:** Campbell (1984) p. 207-8; Cass. Dio 52. 25.

‘They (soldiers) had no natural connection with the nexus of power and patronage that maintained the rule of the emperors’.³²⁵

Soldiers as a discrete community

It is not easy to gain a clear picture of the social consciousness or position of soldiers. The ancient sources focus on their activities in war, and on specific instances of their involvement in politics and interaction with civilians; the latter two elements normally generating marked disapproval. It has been noted, for example, that soldiers made relatively few appearances in Latin fiction. Of relevance here are ideas that have appeared under the banner of ‘Theoretical Roman Archaeology’. Largely focused on manifestations of the Roman Empire in the provinces and the resulting response of the indigenous populations, studies in this field are also contributing to a reassessment of soldiers in that context. Two aspects of the military’s role and political nature put forward in this literature are of interest here. One concerns its conceptualisation within modern histories of ancient Rome, the other relates to soldiers’ behaviour and self-image.³²⁶

It has been argued that the political conception of the Roman army in general scholarship has been too much that of a ‘monolithic state institution’ rather than of a collection of sentient human beings. The very term ‘Roman army’ (or even more so, ‘Roman Army’) is increasingly viewed as being anachronistic. It betrays, so the argument runs, underlying analogies with the unified organisation of armies in modern western countries, occupying, as they most often do, a distinct but peripheral role in the body politic. In fact our ancient literary sources by no means always refer to a homogenised *exercitus* (‘army’, ‘trained body of soldiers’). As often used is the plural *legiones* or the even more personalised *milites* (‘soldiers’). In these manifestations it becomes easier to identify a socio-political group within the Roman world. An author who certainly did employ the word *exercitus* was the soldier, Velleius Paterculus. However, in one context his use of the term still served to delineate soldiers as a separate political constituency. In recording Augustus’ elevation of Tiberius to ‘power

³²⁵ **Alexander’s plans:** Diod. Sic. 18. 4. 1-6; Errington p. 59. **Antigonus:** Diod. Sic. 19. 61. 1-4; Shipley p. 73-74. **Hellenistic kings:** Carrié p. 103. **Publius Decius:** Livy 7. 35. 2. **Apparent gap:** Campbell (2002b) p. 33-34.

³²⁶ **Fiction:** Carrié p. 100-102. **Theoretical Roman Archaeology:** For a wide sample of this material, see the reports of proceedings at the annual conferences on Theoretical Roman Archaeology (TRAC), variously edited, between 1994 and 1999. For a detailed reference, see James, S. in the bibliography.

equal to his own' in 13 CE, the authority in question was described as being 'in all the provinces and armies'. In this manner, the power to command the soldiers was not indicated as being subsumed under the control of the provinces, but was highlighted as separate element in authority over the state. It is true that *exercitus* and its variants were employed as coin legends. However, from a survey of the British Museum collection, these instances are concentrated in the reigns of Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian, and in times of prominent civil wars, such as 68-70 CE and the 180s CE. A possible explanation might connect the phenomenon to those named rulers' military insecurity, wars and legionary tours. Further, the Trajanic and Hadrianic examples record a specific Roman army, rather than 'the' army; thus *EXERC-SYRLACVS* and *EXERCITVS DACICUS*. This differentiation becomes more pronounced on coins that refer to particular legions, such as the *LEG VI* of Marcus Aurelius and a whole series issued under Septimius Severus denoting legions 1 - 30.³²⁷

While the idea of the Roman 'Army' as a single political institution may be anachronistic, more is now being made of soldiers' consciousness of being part of what is termed an 'imagined community'. This conception recognises the value systems and psychological impact involved in becoming a Roman soldier. A telling example was the frequency with which provincials adopted a Romanised name on enlistment, thus encapsulating the extent to which their identity was now to be absorbed in an all-embracing community. Again, our elite ancient authors tend to explain the endemic unruliness of soldiers in terms of individual corruption and degeneracy; so, to some extent, it must have been. However, it has been argued that at another level such behaviour may relate to the democratic traditions of free speech in Republican assemblies and even to wider conceptions of the warrior class in the ancient world. Such arguments receive support from scholarship beyond that focusing on the ancient world. Research into collective responses to authority and into self-imposed constraints on behaviour within modern military units has identified features that are specific to the soldier's perspective. Amongst soldiers of peasant stock the moral ties of military comradeship and the war experience of veterans have been seen to influence behaviour in ways that are independent of the individual's social origins. Thus the solidarity and

³²⁷ **Anachronistic views and language:** James (1999) p. 14; Carrié p. 100. **Tiberius' power:** Vell. Pat. 2. 121. 1. *EXERCITVS*: BMC Nerva 5-9; BMC Hadrian 1674, 1686. **Marcus:** BMC 500. **Septimius Severus:** BMC 7-25.

high combat morale of Swiss yeoman farmers and Flemish burgher pikemen had more to do with ‘...the inherent nature of their military rather than their civilian groups.’ External signals of such an ethos amongst Roman soldiers are too numerous to catalogue in detail. A few examples include distinctive vocabulary, dress and hairstyles, besides more official indicators, such as the wearing of broad belts (*baltei*), and, of course, the legal right to carry weapons. Although important social, linguistic and behavioural characteristics common to Roman soldiers have been seen as relating to the sociological concept of the ‘total institution’, such an idea should not be pushed too far. In other aspects of their life, such as religion, soldiers maintained important links with the civilian community.³²⁸

Another aspect of Roman soldiers’ behaviour, their meetings in camp *contiones*, can be seen to have wide political resonance. In discussion of the ordinary soldiers in the Homeric army, it has been commented that they

‘...play a significant and communally indispensable role. The battles are fought and decided by mass armies. Although lacking initiative and vote, the assembly witnesses and legitimises decisions and actions...Leaders who ignore the assembly’s opinion do so at their own risk; failure may jeopardise their position.’

The limiting effect of ancient soldiers in assembly has been traced in relation to the power of both Homeric heroes and the Macedonian monarchy. A practical demonstration of the authority of soldiers in assembly was provided by Plutarch. In 227 BCE Aratus of Sicyon was blamed by the Achaean army under his command because his inaction led to the death of Lydiades of Megalopolis. As a result

‘...the Achaeans left the field in anger (and) forced him to accompany them to Aegium. Here they held an assembly, and voted not to give him money and not to maintain mercenaries for him’.

The special status of Roman legionary *contiones* is highlighted by the fact that other forms of collectivity outside their formal organisation were perhaps understandably

³²⁸ **Imagined community:** James (1999) p. 15-16. **Free speech:** Livy 8. 33. **Military ethos:** Ashworth p 456-7, 469. **External signals:** Coulston p. 91; Juv. 16. 48. **Total institution:** Pollard (1996) p. 223, 226; Goffman (1961).

frowned upon. For example, laws are recorded that forbade soldiers in camp form *collegia*.³²⁹

In the Imperial period direct evidence of soldiers acting in relation to a collective political will is scattered and difficult to interpret. What, for example, are we to make of the account in Cassius Dio of the detachment of 1,500 javelin men who travelled from Britain to Rome in 185 CE? In that version of events the incident occurred after a failed attempt by elements of the army in Britain to proclaim one of their number as emperor. This rebellion followed serious fighting on the island in the previous year and was related to disquiet among the soldiers about the growing authority of Tigridius Perennis, the Praetorian prefect, leading directly or indirectly to his downfall. Although both Herodian and the *Historia Augusta* noted elements of these happenings, the javelin men from Britain only occurred in Cassius Dio. There they were said to have been 'chosen' by officers of the British legions and 'sent' to Rome, therefore appearing to be some sort of agreed delegation. Arriving in the City, the soldiers were said to have met with Commodus himself and to have convinced him that their purpose was to warn that Perennis was planning treachery. The most recent treatment of this strange story is surely correct to question earlier interpretations, including that of Brunt, that sought to connect it to specific political events. While it seems most likely that the tale as told by Dio is untrue, the fact that he included it must say something about plausible contemporary views of soldiers' behaviour. In a broader sense it has been argued that the behaviour of the Homeric Greek army gathered in assembly should play a crucial role in our conception of the depicted political landscape. Evidence can also be brought to bear from sources at first sight even less directly relevant to Roman military camps. In discussing the nature of Greek theatre, Goldhill has emphasised that the action of Athenians gathering in an audience was imbued with features that gave it political significance. It was seen as being analogous with their gatherings for other purposes, in the courts and in formal assembly. In each instance, a body of citizens came together in some privileged manner; arguments were heard and judgements were made in a competitive context. Aristotle sought to establish an enhanced role for citizens in assembly. He ascribed to such a body a superior aggregate of deliberative wisdom, in

³²⁹ **Homeric army:** Raaflaub (1980) p. 355; Ducrey p. 53-54; *Od.* 10. 187-195. **Macedon:** Ducrey p. 59-60. **Aratus:** Plut. *Arat.* 37. 3. *Collegia:* Dig. 47. 22. 1.

the same sense as it possessed an aggregate of feet or hands. Thus, Goldhill was justified when he concluded that in such a situation

‘...to be in an audience is not just part of the social fabric of life. It is a fundamental and defining political act.’³³⁰

My proposal here is not that the Homeric army and Athenian theatre audience provide any precise parallels with Roman soldiers at a camp meeting; it is rather that such evidence should sensitise us to the likely special status of any large-scale audience and to the presence of a political element in any of the ancient world’s institutionally organised mass gatherings. The Roman military had from its earliest manifestations never been anything less than an institutionally organised mass gathering, given extra significance by the operation of specifically religious requirements. In that context it therefore becomes more plausible to interpret soldiers’ activities, and the behaviour of emperors towards them, in a consistently political manner. The process by which Galba adopted Piso as his successor has already been discussed in relation to the non-payment of a donative (page 239). It is also significant that the venue for this occasion was the Praetorian camp. Tacitus drew attention to this location by recording (a presumably invented) discussion about the appropriateness of the other possibilities, the Forum and the Curia. In a rare, positive comment on soldiers’ involvement in politics, he suggested that their ‘...goodwill...was by no means to be despised’ if it could be obtained without bribery. Modern parallels may be useful to illustrate some of the mechanisms at work in the relationship between Roman soldiers and politics. Under political pressure during the American occupation of Iraq in 2003, President Bush was reported as:

‘Speaking in his favourite setting of a military base, before a cheering audience of soldiers...’.

A plausible analysis might suggest that when feeling threatened, even a democratically elected twenty-first century ruler knows the most secure location of his power.³³¹

³³⁰ **British Javelin men and Perennis:** Cass. Dio 72. 8. 1-10. 1; Birley (2000) p. 187-188; Brunt (1973); Hekster p. 64. **Elements:** Herodian 1. 9. 7; SHA *Comm.* 6. 1-3. **Delegation:** Cass. Dio 72. 9. 2(2). **Aggregate:** *Pol.* 1281b1-10; John Stuart Mill (1861 p. 30) had something of the same idea of aggregating the impact of active minds when he identified collectivity as a major criterion of good government. **Homeric army:** Barker p. 93ff. **Audience as political act:** Goldhill p. 62.

³³¹ **Galba and Piso:** Tac. *Hist.* 1. 17; Ash p. 24. **Bush:** *The Independent* (13 September 2003).

Conclusion

Relevant to the issue of soldiers' political involvement is the more fundamental question of what constituted politics in Imperial Rome. On this matter it has long been tempting to accept the views of our elite sources. For them the constituents of politics equated to two broad areas: the activities of the senate and magistrates, usually reflecting a nostalgic, resentful or guilty idealisation of the lost Republic; and, in acknowledgement of the realities of the post-Augustan age, the personalities and behaviour of the ruling emperor and his circle. Of these, the latter was generally portrayed as a more or less grimly perverted substitute for the former. Within such a definition it was reasonable to analyse the role of soldiers as largely instrumental to the schemes and conflicts of the elite players, and to characterise the political consciousness of the troops as encompassing nothing more fundamental than their own short-term pecuniary interests. This view of the politics of ancient Rome and of the military's place within it had its roots in two aspects of the academic tradition. One mirrored the preoccupations of the ancient literary sources, concentrating on the activities of the ruling elite. The substance of politics was consistently limited to a narrative of the circumstances by which power was obtained and managed by the individuals who ruled. The second aspect, more specific to the study of ancient history and the classics, was and is an understandable reluctance to diverge too far from the path provided by the surviving literary sources. Analysis that strays outside this narrow limit can appear wide open to characterisation as speculative anachronism, although, as suggested, close adherence to it may expose any theorising to the often self-serving agenda of ancient authors. From the perspective of an analysis that is locked into the outlook of our ancient literary sources, J. B. Campbell has been cited as an exponent of a view of Roman soldiers as operating outside normal political structures. His 2002 restatement of this argument was, as before, chiefly based on the unexplored assumption that soldiers' apparent major concern about their own pay and conditions automatically removed them from the principal theatre of politics. In addition to questions about our literary sources' credibility on this matter, it should by now be clear that such evidence can be turned on its head. The totality of information about the emperor's relationship with his troops demonstrated that in Rome's militaristic society the interests and well-being of soldiers were themselves central issues in politics. Evidence noted by Campbell, that after 68-69 CE it was not until the end of the second century that another emperor was overthrown by a provincial army, supports this

interpretation. The care taken by the emperor to manage the relationship with his troops ensured his survival. It can also be added, again sampling Campbell's own evidence, that the undoubted interest taken by most successful emperors in their relationship with the senate was itself not unconnected to concerns about the army; '...senators provided most of the army commanders'.³³²

Alternative visions of the nature of Roman politics have been developed in studying the nature of imperialism in the wider Empire. Allied to an application of 19th and 20th century sociological, anthropological and political science, such approaches provide a different perspective on the role of the military in the authority of the emperors. An important aspect of this alternative vision is related to a rejection of the rhetorically inspired perception of the Roman military as remote from the civilian population, circling the Empire ready to impose its will on outsiders. This view is replaced in the words of Alston by one of soldiers

'...intimately involved in the everyday life of a Roman province...a very visible presence...(bringing) Roman Imperial power to the cities and villages'.

Crucially for the present thesis the same author continues:

'The army would provide the means for the imperial power becoming a real and intrusive element in the life of a provincial'

As the evidence has revealed, this analysis can be generalised from the provinces to the Empire as a whole. Its application is central to an examination of the authority of the Emperor himself.³³³

Soldiers were more than instruments in the hands of elite politicians vying for supreme power. Their special and personal relationship with the emperor was integral to the definition of that power, a situation recognised and made operational by both parties. Thus it was that elements of the relationship between emperor and ordinary soldier could be seen as superseding the plans of apparently more politically sophisticated army officers. Tacitus described a number of instances during the crises of 68-69 CE in

³³² **Pay and conditions:** p. 110; **Management and survival:** p. 115; see also the account of Septimius Severus' deathbed advice to his sons (Cass. Dio 76. 15. 2). **Army commanders:** Campbell (1984) p. 217.

³³³ **Alternative visions:** See, for example, Webster and Cooper or Mattingly (1997). **Soldiers and provincials:** Alston (1995) p. 7.

which the troops and their immediate commanders supported different candidates for the throne. In one, remaining loyal to the claims of Vitellius over those of Vespasian, German legionaries were given a clear expression of their particular perspective. They complained that the generals supporting Vespasian wanted 'to rob them of their emperor'. In another, Tacitus baldly stated the differing allegiances:

'The common soldiers' loyalty to Vitellius was beyond question, while the higher ranks inclined towards Vespasian.'

In a later context, this situation could lead to troops assassinating their own officers.³³⁴

³³⁴ **Soldiers and commanders:** Tac. *Hist.* 3. 13, 4, 26; Cass. Dio 79. 32. 3; Lendon (1997) p. 252.

9. General Conclusion

This thesis began with an emphasis on the general relevance of its subject matter and with indications of its particular applicability to the study of the Roman Empire. The first of these has been restated frequently; for instance,

‘The ways in which power is gained and maintained constitute a central problem in every society’.

The principal focus taken on the second has also been noted elsewhere; for example a review of Campbell (1984) noted the

‘...often cited but rarely studied secret of the Roman Empire – that the power of the emperor rested ultimately on the loyalty of the army.’

To help make up this observed deficiency has been the intention of the present thesis. To this end, the general ethos of Rome as a coercive, military community has been outlined, as has the function of psychological dominance as the driving force of both individual and collective political activity. Evidence has been cited to indicate the particular role of soldiers in Roman politics; also revealed was how the Imperial regimes yoked this role to the prevailing culture of individual domination in developing a personal relationship with their soldiers. To establish this characterisation of Ancient Rome it has been found necessary to react against alternative modern analyses. This has resulted in part from taking the explicit evidence of ancient authors more at face value, rather than fitting their statements into prevailing socio-political patterns. Nevertheless, modern theorising about the sociology of political power has provided useful support for the view taken of Rome’s power structures, for example by confirming the coercive basis of all governments. As expressed by Weber:

‘All political structures use force, but they differ in the manner in which and the extent to which they use or threaten to use it’.

Ideas such as these have also helped to elucidate the continuity of Rome’s political ethos over time and to place it within a wider conception of power in the ancient world.³³⁵

There is certainly nothing original in the contention that Rome was a highly militarised entity, even by the standards of the ancient world. As outlined in chapter two, the

³³⁵ **Importance of the subject:** Maier p. 709. **Military loyalty:** Wilkes p. 242. **Sociology:** Weber (1948) p. 159.

conclusions of ancient thinking on the philosophy of power seemed to be in no doubt on the matter. Modern statements of this characterisation also abound. In relation to the Imperial era, that of Jean Gagé was as clear as any, 'L'empire romain est une monarchie militaire'. He went on to emphasise the truth of this categorisation, whether it was

'...dans la personne d'un Marc-Aurèle ou d'un Maximin, toujours il se résume en un impérateur, chef des armées.'

More generally, and as represented by Nicolet in his study of the citizen in the Republic:

'Like all ancient cities, but perhaps to a greater extent than any other, Rome was a community of warriors.'

A reason for the choice of Nicolet's formulation is that he went on to refine the idea as it applied specifically to Rome by substituting the word 'soldier' for that of 'warrior'. In so doing he distinguished the latter as a semi-independent, elite individual acting with the primary motivation of seeking personal glory; the former as a disciplined member of a citizen militia. It is suggested that in casting its military tradition in this form, Rome established both the basis for its long-term success and for the strongly coercive nature of its body politic. Thus, after the third century of its Imperial era, when Rome was threatened by dangerous external enemies, it was 'saved by a military revolution'. Reforms carried out by emperors, some of whom were described by hostile sources to be so close to their soldiers that they had risen from the legions' lower ranks, enabled the Empire to maintain its aggressive dominance. Several of these rulers were said to have emerged from unusually humble origins: Diocletian the son of a freedman; Galerius the offspring of a Carpathian cattle-herder; or Constantius Chlorus 'an obscure country-gentleman'. Even if the accounts of their modest parentage were true, their portrayal in the standard modern analysis as a new breed of 'soldier-emperors' hardly seems justified by the evidence cited in chapters seven and eight. Rather their emergence is better explained as another manifestation of the Roman military ethos, adapting itself to changed circumstances. Such renewals had already occurred during the first century BCE and in the establishment of the Augustan principate.³³⁶

³³⁶ **Roman Militarism:** Gagé p. 1; Nicolet (1976) p. 89-90. **Third Century Crisis and low class emperors:** Brown p. 24-27 ; Nicasic p. 10.

Equally obvious in its relevance to the fundamentally militaristic nature of Rome is the fact of its empire. It has been argued in the case of Macedon that:

‘The centrality of the army in the state system created by Philip led naturally to an ongoing process of military conquest’.

On an altogether different scale of chronology and social complexity, surely the same simple point holds true for Rome. Observations on the nature of other states by ancient writers of Roman history also revealed their views about Rome itself. In an editorial comment on fourth century BCE Sparta, Plutarch pronounced on the impossibility of it recovering past expansionist glories. He stated that it was the earlier imperialist generations that had been in error:

‘For to a civil polity best arranged for peace and virtue and unanimity they had attached empires and sovereignties won by force.’

An implicit contrast with the success of Rome as an empire must be contained in Plutarch’s unspoken view on the nature of its government. The modern sociological study of power and empires has provided support for a direct correlation between the existence of empire and coercive political authority (see chapter three). Although not without their general critics and specific difficulties of application to the ancient world, the definitions of social power that emerge from the work of Weber and his derivatives do seem to provide useful perspectives on the evidence of our ancient sources. Chapters four and five considered that evidence in relation to the development and operation of coercive political power in Rome. Direct relationships were identified between the recorded psychological imperatives towards domination, Roman self-image as a military people, and the nature of the City’s government and rule over others. Illustrating these connections, the example of Britain demonstrated that throughout its involvement with the island, Roman initiatives were driven more by the personal ambitions of emperors and commanders than by any practical military or geopolitical factors. Attempts have been made to portray some of these campaigns, such as that of Septimius Severus of 208 CE, as chiefly motivated by the need to establish secure frontiers against threatening barbarians. Perhaps such an analysis reflected its origins in end-of-empire, mid-twentieth century Britain. Certainly, it is useful to note that the

psychological domination and personal glory explanation chimes best with the explicit comments of our ancient authors.³³⁷

It has been a consistent element of this thesis to take seriously aspects of ancient source material that have often been acknowledged with a cursory nod, neglected altogether or even actively denied. Throughout this thesis reference has been made to interpretations of Roman political power that have dismissed, played down or recognised and then largely ignored its essentially coercive nature. Some have gone out of their way to circumvent this reality, doing so with varying degrees of subtlety. For example, Ando attempted to deal with the issue by direct and immediate confrontation. At the very outset of his detailed exposition, he declared:

‘No date identifies that moment when Rome ceased to rule her subjects through coercion and began to rely on their good will.’

Readers of this thesis will, I hope, respond with the comment that the absence of a date in the record is hardly surprising, since the change never took place. More persuasively, Ando also deployed an array of sociological theorising, apparently underpinning his contention that the developed Roman Empire constituted a progressively more inclusive *communis patria*. In this conceptualisation, coercive authority, although still available to the emperors, was of less importance in the maintenance of power than an ever widening appreciation of the benefits of Roman bureaucratic justice. Max Weber was invoked in theoretical support of this contention, although only via a secondary source that explicitly considered the sociologist’s ideas from the point of view of his contribution to the ‘development and practical application of legal theory’. In fact, the relevant passages in Weber do not sustain the weight of Ando’s interpretation. Indeed it is topically tempting to identify in Ando’s characterisation of Roman power (constitutionally based and widely accepted because of its material and cultural benefits) the colouring present in scholarship emanating from the current world super-power. These points were not missed by early British reviewers, and it may be indicative that a recent trans-Atlantic review of American scholarship in ancient history failed to identify the influence of contemporary politics as one of the factors intrinsic to the pursuit. Parallels are readily available from an earlier era and another world power,

³³⁷ **Macedon and Rome:** Billows p. 219. **Sparta and Rome:** Plut. *Ages*. 33. 2. **Critics of Weber:** Bourdieu (1980) p. 141. **Value of Weber:** Raaflaub (2003) P. 423. **Britain and glory:** Isaac (1992) p. 387-390; Cass. Dio 76. 11-12. **Britain and defence:** Millar (1964) p. 148-149.

some of them probably unconscious, others quite explicit. Thus, the editors of the 1934 *Cambridge Ancient History* on the Augustan Empire were probably unaware that their summary of early Emperor cult bore a comfortable resemblance to the contemporary Church of England, as the cult

‘...set Rome and the emperor in its due place, neither too exalted nor too visionary... (and) planted the conception of a religion of the State which transcended but did not challenge the deeper emotions of worship.’

On the other hand, within his usually cool and measured approach, Brunt could plainly state in 1965 that the Roman and British Empires shared a number of features, including that they had both ‘...undoubtedly established peace and order in a large part of the world’. We have already explored the violent underpinnings of Roman ‘peace’ (page 105). In relation to Ando’s analysis, and even prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, an overt American military presence in 132 of the 190 countries in the United Nations must be relevant.³³⁸

As an approach to the subject of the coercive element in the power of the emperor, the present thesis might claim a relevant precedent. William Harris’ study of attitudes towards notions of aggressive expansion by Rome during the Republic took a similarly revisionary perspective. In particular, he argued for the validity of Polybius’ stated views on the matter. It is perhaps appropriate, therefore, that I should choose an unequivocal statement of Polybius to represent under-analysed information as it applies to this thesis: ‘Now in general the Romans rely on force (*βία*) in all their undertakings.’ The meaning of the Greek term is made clear in situations in which overwhelming physical force was invoked. Homer employed it to describe the Cyclops’ domination over the Phaeacians and Hesiod used it to account for the defeat of the Nemean Lion; ‘...but mighty Herakles’ force overcame it.’ At this fundamental level, in its Greek origin, the word *ῥώμη* itself has meanings of ‘might’ and ‘bodily strength’. As such it was used by Herodotus to describe the primary physical attribute of the heroes Cleobis and Biton. In a more overtly political context, Thucydides had Spartan envoys employ

³³⁸ **Denial of coercion:** Ando p. 19. *Communis patria*: ibid. p. 10-15. **Sociology:** ibid. p. 19-29. **Weber:** (1968) p. 217, 954; Ando p. 27; Kronman p. 50, back cover. **Reviews of Ando:** Kelly, C (2001) p. 32; Levick (2001) p. 240. **Ancient History in the USA:** Potter (2001) p. 315. **Roman and other Empires:** Cook, Adcock and Charlesworth p. vi; Brunt (1990) p. 110. **American military presence:** ‘*The Model Empire*’ (Channel 4, 2002).

the word when trying to emphasise the continuing power of their city after the disaster at Pylos. Plutarch included an association with the Greek word as the first among the various explanations that he recorded for Rome's name.³³⁹

Other studies of the Roman state that have failed to highlight coercion are not hard to find. In *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, Lintott acknowledged that 'Rome's military needs determined the shape of the political year'. However, he went on to detail how the Republican state functioned, concentrating on the legal and procedural relationship between the senate, people and magistrates. While noting that the *comitia centuriata*, and eventually other electoral assemblies, met on the *campus Martius* (military parade ground), Lintott judged the survival of that form of social organisation to represent a vestigial representation of groupings based on 'worth, wealth and age' rather than as having any military significance. He made much, albeit reasoned and critical, use of Polybius' analysis of the Roman state. However, Lintott chose to relegate his source's view of the coercively powerful consuls to that of an awestruck provincial. Lendon delineated the 'day-to-day business of government' as collecting taxes, providing drafts for the army and keeping the peace. He acknowledged that soldiers were 'involved' in these administrative activities, and that coercion, at least of others by Romans, was integral to the Empire. However, nowhere in this analysis is an appreciation that the getting and maintenance of power itself was a primary focus of Rome's rulers or that coercion was at the heart of this process. The omission appears to be compounded in the same author's consideration of patronage as the main mechanism of power relations in Rome. Lendon ascribed considerable potency to this idea, but admitted that it lacked something, since:

'Part of the psychological basis of patronage as a method of rulership remains obscure.'

His attempted clarification involved concepts of honour and pride, ideas which are vulnerable to the same critique as that of patronage itself (see page 180). Fergus Millar provided another example, in a similar manner to that already noted of Paul Zanker (see pages 140-141), of analyses that acknowledge but fail to give sufficient emphasis to the role of coercion. He attempted to define the authority of an emperor in terms of the recorded content of his written and verbal communications with his subjects. In

³³⁹ Harris on Polybius: p. 107ff. Polybius on *βλα*: 1. 37. 7; Harris p. 17. Homer: *Od.* 6. 5. Hesiod: *Theog.* 332; Liddell and Scott p. 314. *Πόμῃ*: *ibid.* p. 1578; Hdt. 1. 31; Thuc. 4. 18; Plut. *Rom.* 1. 1.

doing so, Millar identified the role as commander of the soldiers as ‘the most obvious’ of ‘other elements’ explaining his power. The current study reverses this analysis, presenting the military role as the key determinant of Imperial identity, and considering in chapter six some of the relevant ‘other’ factors.³⁴⁰

The thrust of this thesis is not that emperors ruled solely through coercion and physical force. As argued by Bendix:

‘Power needs ideas and legitimation...Rulers...could never obtain compliance if each command were purely random and had to be backed by force sufficient to compel obedience.’

Accession to power is routinely followed by efforts to shape its meaning and legitimisation – justifying and rationalising both its exercise and acceptance. It is fundamental that this is a reciprocal process, involving the commitment of both ruler and ruled to particular attitudes and behaviour that in turn affect each other’s attitudes and behaviour. Runciman characterised this process as the distribution of what he termed ‘institutional’ power; that is, power organised on the basis of rules, which may or may not be mutually acknowledged or agreed. Crucially he saw this distribution as being a defining characteristic of society and that it was always a two way process:

‘*A* cannot have power over *B* without *B* having some power, however minimal, over *A*’.

Despite the undoubtedly reciprocal characteristics of this relationship, the fragility of the rules by which it was underpinned can readily be demonstrated. In a Classical context this reveals the essential focus of power to be coercion. Two examples from Valerius Maximus establish the point. In the first, he told a story about Agesilaus, to the effect that the Spartan King simply set aside the laws of the state for one day when he believed that illegal action was necessary against certain individuals suspected of plots. In the second, a Sabine farmer attempted to fulfil the stipulations of an oracle that promised his country worldwide domination. However, he was unwise enough to tell a Roman priest what he was doing. The priest promptly got rid of him by giving misleading advice about the rites to be performed, and then carried out the correct ritual on behalf of Rome. Trivial as these examples may appear, they nevertheless

³⁴⁰ **Political year:** Lintott (1999) p. 13-14. *Comitia Centuriata*: ibid. p. 41, 61. **Consuls:** ibid. 193-194. **Government tasks:** Lendon (1997) p. 4, 6. **Patronage:** ibid. p. 11-12. **Critique:** see pages 179-180. **Millar:** (1992) p. 617-618.

illustrate an ideology in which the subversion of both law and religion was perfectly acceptable in the cause of state security and expansion. The priorities on display here are emphasised by the fact that Valerius Maximus included both stories in his compilation of instances of *Fortuna*'s blessings, listing the first under his heading of 'Things Wisely Done' and the second under 'Things Craftily Done'.³⁴¹

The useful distinction to be made here in political terms is between power and force. In the former the strong issues orders that are obeyed by the weak; in the latter the strong physically coerces the weak to respond in specific ways. On such an analysis, power is perceived as an active phenomenon in which the weak cooperate in their oppression, as often as not seeking ways in which to demonstrate their acceptance of the situation. Force, on the other hand, involves the passive response of the weak, reacting to situations over which they have no control in order to minimise their exposure to physical compulsion. From this perspective power can be effective well beyond its immediate physical reach; force is inefficient in its application, expensive and dangerous in its exercise, consuming itself in use. Nevertheless, it is an underlying contention of this thesis that the legitimisation of coercive power, its reciprocal aspects and its absorption into other forms of authority are alterations in outward form, not transformations in the essential nature of social power as domination through force. As illustration, Velleius Paterculus discussed the relative positions of Pompey and Caesar on the eve of their civil war in 49 BCE. He distinguished between the former as having the 'appearance' of power, while the latter possessed its 'reality', the difference being that:

'Pompey was armed with the authority of the senate, Caesar with the devotion of his soldiers'

Thus it is fair to conclude that

'...whenever a mandate to rule is to sway the minds and hearts of men, it requires the exercise of force or the awareness that those who rule are able, and will not hesitate, to use force if that is needed to assert their will.'³⁴²

³⁴¹ **Institutional power** : Runciman p. 2. **Agesilaus**: Val. Max. 7. 2. ext. 15. **Sabine farmer/Roman priest**: ibid. 7. 3. 1.

³⁴² **Power and force**: Luttwak p. 197-198. **Pompey and Caesar**: Vell. Pat. 2. 49. 2. **Force is necessary**: Bendix (1978) p. 16-17.

Aristotle theorised that in his ideally organised state, combining the best features of oligarchy and democracy, 'The government should be confined to those who carry arms'. He went on to suggest that the earliest Greek states had developed from monarchies and oligarchies into 'constitutional governments' as popular participation in war had widened. Although these views have been criticised as being based on 'poorly formed inferences', they do appear to be consonant with the idea of the military's role in the establishment of coercive political authority. There can be no doubting that soldiers were the source of coercive force within the Roman state. As such, Part Two of this thesis established their role as one of three constituencies, alongside the senate/elite and the people of Rome, that had to be won over and kept loyal if an emperor was to succeed in establishing and maintaining his dominance. The political potency of each of these agencies was demonstrated by respectively: the frequency with which the legions and the Praetorians were directly involved in changes of emperor; the fate of Julius Caesar; and lasting concern about sedition in Rome and care for measures to discourage it. Woolf linked these issues with the physical coercion used to maintain authority in Rome. He invoked Foucault's timelessly rhetorical question, 'Isn't power simply a form of warlike domination?' stating that:

'The emperors ruled not by abolishing violence but by channelling it, using and perpetuating rivalries...to ensure a dynamic equilibrium which they controlled and which necessitated their participation'.

A telling image of the precariousness of an emperor's position in this situation and of the violence intrinsic to its management was attributed to Tiberius. He was said to have likened his task to that of 'holding a wolf by its ears'. It should hardly be surprising, then, that for centuries Roman rulers were so closely connected to their soldiers, thus exemplifying Weber's stark dictum that, 'The king is everywhere primarily a war-lord.' Indeed the eventual weakening of that link resulted in a diminution of the Imperial office itself. Up to the end of the fourth century CE the personal involvement of emperors with their troops had been a vital factor in securing their political power. On the death of Theodosius I in 395, the vagaries of dynastic succession resulted in the extreme youth of his successors. In these circumstances, effective power in the western Empire passed from the emperors to the military commanders themselves, men such as Stilicho and Aetius. Thus soldiers, the long-time

agents of coercive political power in Rome, finally emerged to wield that authority directly.³⁴³

³⁴³ **Greek states:** Arist. Pol. 1297b 2-3, 16-28. **Criticism of Aristotle:** Wees 71f. 82. **Emperors and violence:** Woolf (1993) p. 191; Foucault (1980) p. 123. **Tiberius:** Suet. *Tib.* 25. **War-lord:** Weber (1948) p. 251. **Weakened link:** Lee p. 228-229. **Power to the soldiers:** MacGeorge p. 5-14.

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The primary sources consulted in this thesis have been read in translation, mainly that of the Loeb editions. Other translations have been used, such as Woodman's 2004 rendition of Tacitus' *Annals* and Ambler's 2001 version of Xenophon's *The Education of Cyrus*. A full bibliography is available of the primary sources employed. These sources have been referenced following the guidelines of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary (Third Edition)*. With the aid of language dictionaries, I have made tentative use of my limited knowledge of Greek and Latin on a small number of occasions.

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